



Omae wo **OTAKU** ni  
shiteyaru kara  
Ore wo **RIAJU** ni  
shite kure !

# 村上 凜

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## ファンタジア文庫

# Omae o Otaku ni Shiteyaru kara, Ore o Riajuu ni Shitekure!

vol.3

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# Chapter 1

“Sempai, you have exchanged emails with Mai-chan at the party yesterday, right? Did you mail her after that?”

August started today, and temperature increased drastically. I, Kashiwada Naoki, with my eyes similar to that of a dead fish, bothered by the sweet voice of a woman in the kitchen behind me. Yes, I’m at work, on the front.

“Well, we have not exchanged our addresses, to say more precise, I gave her my address, but she didn’t write me anything.”

“Oh, are you serious? Well, I thought you were so nice to each other.”

Of course, girls from work would not talk to me. I’m just hearing her conversation with that creepy Kato-sempai. Despite today is a weekday and now is summer vacations, customers are few, so they can chat like this.

I’m just serving rare customers, and warn them that they have five minutes left. I’m silently listening to the chat between the creepy-flashy Kato and so-called workplace idol woman. They sure have their spare time, talking all this time in the kitchen. It’s not like they are skipping their job: once an order came, they do drinks and meals and carry to customers.

By the way, they planned to go to a barbecue yesterday, but rain interrupted their plans, and they did a drinking party instead. I was right to skip it. If I had been there, I would just listen to other’s trivial chats without saying a word, and I wouldn’t have befriended with anybody. I have been listening to their conversation in the kitchen for a while, and I finished my shift at 2 PM.

Once the job was over, I took out my phone. Koigasaki didn’t write to me today as well. Nobody is around, so I can make a deep sigh. Since the ‘gratitude call’ two days ago, we didn’t exchange by a single email.

Why I behaved as a mad? I don’t understand myself. I don’t like this awkward situation, yet I don’t want to contact her at all. I guess, I’ll look for previous emails. I have no received emails today, and yesterday I had a single spam message. Before that, there were four messages from Sakurai Azuki dated July

30, the day of the cosplay event. I want to read them again.

That day, Sakurai-san send me an email for the first time, and I was surprised how cheerful it was. I thought she disliked me, and I don't know why she became so cheerful all of sudden. The first mail.

[Thank you for yesterday! I appreciate your help. Let's do a cosplay by three of us next time! (smile)

P.S. Kashiwada-kun, are you in love with Momo-chan?]

When I had read this mail for the first time, I wasn't sure that to do, read it again and again, and ended up replying:

[Thank you for today! You helped us a lot!

Eh... A cosplay? I don't mind if you're fine with me! (smile)

Am I in love with Koigasaki? Why do you think so? (smile) Not at all. (smile) ]

I polished own text to be nice to Sakurai-san, however after I sent it, I started to think that her invitations were but pleasantry, and what if this email is her joke? And I've replied with in earnest... She might be laughing reading my reply. And I was sad for a while, before she sent me another email.

[Seriously? You have promised! (smile) You are not in love with Momo-chan, you say? You helped her so much I was sure you love her. (laugh)]

I've promised? What did she mean? A cosplay? So she really wanted someone like me to do a cosplay? But why?.. Also, why she'd think I'm in love with Koigasaki? Besides, why is she so concerned by this? I could not understand a thing.

[No-no-no! There were other deep reasons for me to help her. There is no way I'd love her. (laugh) Further to say, we're a small quarrel now (sweat) ]

[Really?? Deep reasons, means it would be uncomfortable for me to ask? (laugh) And what about the quarrel, I thought you were friendly! What happened? ]

Well, I did tell her about the quarrel, but I'm troubled if you'd ask a reason. I don't know can I tell her about Suzuki, and, of course, I can't explain why I got mad. Even to myself.

[It's nothing serious, I'm not sure I can call it a quarrel. (smile) ]

After that, I couldn't resist my fatigue and fell asleep. Next morning, I read an email from her.

[I see! I'm worried! (sweat) I wish you reconcile faster! Oh, it's about twelve o'clock now! (sweat) I'm sorry to keep you late! Good night! ]

I quickly typed her [Morning! I'm sorry I fell asleep yesterday], but then I remembered something and stopped.

I had heard a talk among two girls on work.

"Do you remember that guy who was with me from that matching party? On the evening, I sent him [Okay, good night then (star)] meaning to end that conversation, and the next morning I received [Good morning!] from him along with the yesterday's conversation. Why don't you read between the lines? I ended the conversation. It so annoyed me."

It seems girls are annoyed by "Good morning" along with a yesterday's conversation. Therefore, Sakurai-san may be annoyed if I'd send her an email now. That's not good. After struggling a while, I removed my message. On that, our letters ended by seven emails.

I got onto the train to home and noticed that there is no email from Koigasaki as of yet. What kind of man am I to worry about this?

The next day was a day before when I should go to Odaiba with Hasegawa. Of course, no emails from Koigasaki had come. Also, I had no conversation with Hasegawa since that time.

I guess, it would be good to send "Looking forward to tomorrow" at least now. However, she had not sent me a single answer since then, and it seems Hasegawa don't like to text with me, so I had not enough of braveness to email her.

I spent the day reading magazines and looking on the net, and decided where to go tomorrow.

We will have a lunch, then go to play in Joypolis, and then walk to the Odaiba Seaside Park that Hasegawa wanted to visit. I don't know about a curfew in

Hasegawa's house, so I won't make her walk too much, and will have to start home in appropriate timing. I think it's a good plan as for me.

The rest of problems are... I have to make a good hairstyle, to not fail during that day, to be able to keep conversation... Hey, it's a pile of problems! Well, there is no point to worry right now. Watch in the future more positively, me, it's a date with your beloved Hasegawa!

It's just to put wax on hair. I've grown practiced in this. I got the dense wax from Koigasaki, and I had read magazines at counters, then I had been training to put it properly, so there should be no problems. As for eyebrows, Koigasaki showed me the proper way to handle them, and I continue with it since. And I got proper clothes that were selected by Koigasaki.

Oh, I end up relying on Koigasaki completely. Most of all, it's Koigasaki who did this so I can go to the date with Hasegawa. It seems I can't do a single thing alone. I want to email her, I hate this awkward situation. Also, I want to apologize for my behavior, and I want her to be happy she left a good impression to Suzuki. I want an advice for the date with Hasegawa. And yet, I just don't know what to say her.

Then I remembered that Koigasaki gave me a "date hints" when we were on that date simulation. I think, I need to use that memo right now. But where I put it? I searched in my school bag, then in my wallet, then in my school suit pockets, but I couldn't find it.

Just why I'm so lame, I thought and depressed. Looking at my wrist watches, I noticed that it's already five o'clock. I have a shift from the 6 o'clock, so I have to get ready for that. I have no choice but to give up on the memo.

That day, I was in bad mood on work. I rummaged every place it might be, but there was no purpose of that. I think, chances to find it is very low. I have to give up on the memo. Probably, it would be the quickest way to ask Koigasaki directly, saying that my date is tomorrow. I can restore relationship at the same time. Yes, it's not the time for indecision. Right after I finished my shift, I decided to write an email to Koigasaki while I'll be on a train.

[Hi there. I'm sorry if you thought I was angry. I wasn't. That's good distance between you and Suzuki decreased. By the way, the date with Hasegawa is

tomorrow, so I thought to look at the note “date hints” that you gave me, but it seems I lost it. I’m sorry! (sweat) Could you please give an advice for a pitiful me? (cry) ]

What a miserable text I’ve typed... It seems like I’m apologizing to get an advice. But I’m really sorry, and it’s easier to send an apology along with something else. I read it again and pressed the send button.

However five minutes past, ten minutes past, but Koigasaki is not replying. I checked if the message was actually sent, but it has the tag “sent” for sure. Even though Koigasaki always replied within three minutes. I could assume that she is so mad she wouldn’t answer despite I sent my apologies. Is this not enough?

I’m starting to worry. Should I write another email, or maybe I should call her? However, my thoughts led me to a certain point. Did I commit something that bad? I was cheerless receiving her call, and nothing more. And I did help Koigasaki a lot, even used my own body for her sake. And now she’s so angry she wouldn’t forgive me despite I apologized? Something wrong with your anger, Koigasaki. I feel annoyed even more, and my will to send her one more message vanished.

The stress I received at work piled up on this annoyance, so I returned home in a very bad mood. Current time is over 11 o’clock, both mother and sister are sleeping. I warmed my cold meal in the microwave and started to eat it thinking what to do with my growing anxiety. My last ray of hope Koigasaki would not reply. I can’t find the memo.

Suddenly, I remembered a relationship guidance that I bought in the previous month, “Bible of popular men”. I opened my bookshelf and took it out. I have looked it through once, but it wasn’t that helpful for a senior high school student like me. However, I have no other choice. I found “The Date” item.

“Women love gorgeous café with view on the city in the night.”

“Women are suspicious towards those who drags into a hotel after the first date.”

“Avoid showing anger when you driving a car.”

... and so on. This is a guidance for working adults, and have nothing useful for a high school student. Next, I turned on my PC and go to the net. I'm usually looking on the net everything I don't know.

I googled "date hints" and articles about dates displayed. Most of them were intended for women, but I found something for men.

"Close the distance on the first date!" was the title of the article. It seems to be for a pair who are not dating yet, so I thought it fits me.

"1. Talk with the girl. Try to listen to her even if bothers you!"

Oh, I get it. I'm not sure whether it works on Hasegawa, but it should be effective. I typed it into a notepad on my phone.

"2. You managed to drag her out on the date? Don't let it over on "you are a good person"! Try to impress the girl! When it would be a pleasant atmosphere, grab her hand!"

What? It's too hard to be the second! I'm grabbing Hasegawa's hand... Nope, I can't imagine that. It would be a challenge for me.

"Even if you can't afford that, gather your courage for natural physical intimacy! Let her know that you are a male!"

Natural physical intimacy?! Well, it might be easier than grab her hand, but I don't feel I can afford that as well. Is it necessary to give her understand that I'm a male?.. Okay, I'll write this down as well.

"3. It is not necessary to confess her on the first date, but at last demonstrate her your affection."

That's hard again. I won't struggle this much if I could do that. I rather try to conceal my affection from her. I finished reading, and found this text at the end.

"All we said earlier requires courage from you, but if you will show at least a little of courage, the distance between you will get closer!"

I see. Courage is needed everywhere. If my courage will make me a bit closer to Hasegawa, that's worth to do. I'll try to put some effort to do something among these tomorrow!

The clock tells that current time is 1:30 AM. Crap, it would be worst to

oversleep tomorrow. I turned off my PC and immersed in the bath. I was tired at the work, so I almost fell asleep here, but I forced myself to go to the bed. I thought to dry hair after that, but I was so sleepy that closing my eyes for a mere moment to get rid of fatigue caused me to conk out on the sofa. I don't remember anything from that moment on.

## Chapter 2

“Wa-a-a-a!!!” – I saw the clock and screaming. It’s 11 AM. I have only ten minutes left before I have to leave home. How did it happen? I was supposed to wake up early to I would have a one hour before departure to get all together. But I still have ten minutes, I’ll be okay if I’d hurry up!

I run to the bath to wash my face.

“?!” – I lost my words upon looking in the mirror. Few times.

My hairstyle is awful. This is a ridiculous bed hair. By the way, I fell asleep with wet hair.

“Craaap!” – I screamed and turned on the water to wet my hair.

“Naoki, don’t scream from the very morning.” – my sister woke up, but I have no time for her. I’m drying my hair again. Seven minutes have passed since I woke up. I surely have no time for breakfast, so I’m drying hair with my left hand, and brushing my teeth with the right hand. After that, I shaved, put my contact lenses, and put the wax on my dried hair.

The clock tells that the time I had to leave home is passed. I left my hair as is, changed my clothes, and threw the phone into my bag and run out. I reached the station on the bike and got into a train. It was the train that goes 15 minutes after the train I planned to use. I checked the transfer station schedule by the phone. Crap! It seems I’ll arrive in ten minutes after the agreed time. It is the worst thing to happen – a delay for the first date with Hasegawa, and that should never happen! First of all, it’s impossible that Hasegawa would be late.

I looked at the reflection in the train windows and panicked. My hairstyle is not settled at all. I tried to set them, but that was useless. Oh... I often saw a scene when a young man uses the reflection as a mirror, and was creeping out by that, but am I doing the same now? Today I understood their feelings.

I arrived at Shinbashi station and run with all my might from carriage exit to boarding place of Yurikamome line. I passed the wicket, and to Yurikamome boarding by the free side of the escalator. Owing to this, I managed to get on

the train before the one I found it the schedule earlier.

I was panting, but when I get into the carriage and opened the schedule again. It seems I will arrive at the meeting place five minutes late. I must overcome the scheduled time! Even if I've decreased five minutes, I'm still five minutes left. Should I send Hasegawa an apology email? I took out my phone again, and noticed that I have an unread email. Is it from Hasegawa? I closed the schedule and opened the mailbox.

I was surprised by what I saw.

[From: Koigasaki Momo]

It has been four days!

[I'm sorry. I was in the journey when my phone discharged... I've bought the charger today.]

I thought I would cry for real, so calmed I was by this email. Koigasaki wasn't angry at me. Why am I so happy? Something wrong with me. Let's read it ahead.

[Why would you lost the memo?.. Whatever. You're meeting with Hasegawa today already?! From when?]

I wanted to reply Koigasaki saying I'm sorry, but first I have to tell Hasegawa that I'll late, so I typed message for her.

[Hello! I'm sorry, today I'll come five minutes late!] and crying emotion at the end, then I sent it. Koigasaki is next.

[What should do?! I'm on the train, I've overslept today, and I have a terrible bed hairs in addition! Please save me!]

[Why are you always like this?.. Well, where do you plan to go? ]

[A café > Joypolis > Odaiba Seaside Park, I guess]

This email had come within a minute, but next one is not coming. But I received an email from Hasegawa.

[Understood.]

That's all. She might be angry. I thought it would be persistent, but I sent her

[I'm sorry!].

Koigasaki's mail is yet. Could it be she's disappointed with me and she gave up? When was about to get sad, my phone rang. It's an email from Koigasaki.

[I gathered the most important for you, be grateful.

—At a café. Give her the inner seat. Let her see a menu first. Watch your manners.

— Joypolis. Watch if she feels bad. Let her go anywhere she wants.

—At the park. Watch if she feels hurt. (Esp. if she wears sandals)

If you could follow this, she won't think badly of you! ]

Oh, I feel reassured reading this. She's a great person, after all!

[Thanks a lot!!! By the way, I didn't get a reply from you yesterday, so I looked for them in the net. I found something like I have to do physical intimacy and impress her, but what do you think if I'd do that?]

Koigasaki sent me an unexpected reply.

[Physical intimacy?!. At this moment the effect will be the contrary! A girl would be happy when a boy she likes shows thought for her, however if she thinks nothing about him, she would either increase her guard or just disgusted.]

Are you kidding me? It was dangerous! What if I'd act as they wrote on that website?

[I saw scenes in your manga when a girl accidentally happens to be hugged by the main hero, and falls in love with him since. But this is absolutely unreal for the real world, you know? Aside a situation where a girl likes a boy from the start, the only way for you is to raise your attraction points step by step.]

What a long email from Koigasaki! Moreover, she's making my heart hurt.

[B-but... If she agreed to meet with only me, might it be that she doesn't think about me as a nothing? ]

[How can you know that? She might have come only because I didn't come... Okay, I get it. Watch her closely and do according to a situation. And decide

what Hasegawa thinks of you by her actions! I doubt this is true, but if your attraction points are high, you can go with that intimacy thing and show her your feelings. If she not likes you nor hates you, a usual behavior, you can be friendly to her. If she hates you... well, you have to do something with that. If you'd touch a girl who doesn't like you, you will be hated! ]

It seems logical to watch her attitude and change your own accordingly. However...

[But I think I won't be able to get a grasp of what she thinks of me by her attitude.]

[You're right. Okay. Tell me by an email how was her attitude today. I'll think about it and send you an email with recommendations.

HOWEVER!

I think you understand it, but don't you dare to play with your phone in front of Hasegawa! Email me when she went to a toilet or like that. If you can't email me, you don't have to try at all. ]

Then I was close to the station of the destination, Odaiba Seaside Park station, so I put my phone into a pants pocket without replying to Koigasaki.

I was grateful for her emails. I returned my spirits again.

On arriving at Odaiba Seaside Park station, I ran through the wicket and saw Hasegawa. I'm late for five minutes, just as planned.

"Oh, Hasegawa! I'm sorry for being late!" – I quickly ran to Hasegawa.

"You didn't have to run." – said Hasegawa. She's as cool as always, but I guess she carried about me. Restoring my breath, I'm looking at her. A knee-length white lace one-piece dress and bluish cute sandals with a ribbon. Hairs... a ponytail tied with a scrunchie, and she has a basket bag in her hand. The tidy white one-piece is a popular summer fashion... It so bright I can barely see it. Like a summer angel.

"Kashiwada-kun?"

Oh, crap, my mind halted for a moment. That's all because of the heat.

"Oh, sorry! Let's go, then?", – tried to say a prearranged phrase, but I guess

my voice was strange after all. The nervousness, excitement, and fatigue piled up so I'm in danger.

"Kashiwada-kun, you're sweating too much, are you alright?"

"Eh?"

I've only noticed this when Hasegawa pointed it, but I'm sweating as much as I'm under a shower. Well, it's only natural. Aside from the hell hot weather, I have been running all the way except when I was on a train. I opened my bag to take some handkerchief. Oops, I obviously forgot them. I want to die already.

"Could it be that you have no handkerchiefs?"

"Yes... I forgot them." – said with a shameful smile to Hasegawa. She's... offering me a handkerchief.

"Here, if you would like to."

Really? She is an angel's kid!

"No-no-no! It's all right, I can't use your handkerchief for wiping my dirty sweat." – I said quickly, so even emotionless Hasegawa smiled a bit. However, it might be she laughed at me. Yet, I was happy.

"Let's visit a cold place where we could take a drink, then."

What is it?.. Hasegawa carefully suggested this for me. What a good girl. I plan to take a lunch, though. We left the station and entered the building of DECKS Tokyo Beach to find a café to have a meal. Joypolis is located in this building as well.

"Hasegawa, did you have a dinner?"

"No, but I have a breakfast recently and I'm hungry that much. Kashiwada-kun, are you hungry?"

"No, I'm..." – said, when my stomach rose its voice. What is with thing manga-like timing? I'm impressed. I want to drop dead. In fact, I didn't have a breakfast and I'm starving now.

"I see. Let's have a meal somewhere, then."

"Yeah. Sorry..."

Many restaurants should be on the sixth floor, so we used an elevator to get there. I used a pocket tissue to wipe out my sweat (you have to avoid sticking pieces of a tissue to your face, so it's unexpectedly hard), looking at Hasegawa standing in front of me.

The likes of me could go to Odaiba with that Hasegawa... I still can't completely believe in it. It makes me excited just looking at the back of her head... Oh, hey! It's not a right time to be carried away! I guess I have to get rid of this awkward silence.

"Ha-Hasegawa, when did you come to the station?"

"Just before you came. I arrived just in time we agreed."

"I...I see."

...

The conversation is over. Hasegawa never was a garrulous type, and I'm not so good in speaking, so when we alone the silence comes. I couldn't find anything to speak about, and we arrived at the six floor.

"Hasegawa, what café do like to go?"

"I... A place where we could get cold drinks will be enough for me."

Okay, where we can get some drinks?! It's almost everywhere, isn't it?

"I don't mind going to a place where you could take a lunch."

"Eh, really?!"

The most important thing is to allow a girl to choose, but Hasegawa says she is fine to go anywhere. Does it mean I have to choose myself?

"Then..."

I started looking around. There are many restaurants, but I don't which is the better.

"Let me see..."

I want Koigasaki's salvation already! Then, I caught sight of an impressively tasty hamburger.

“That looks so tasty!”

“Let’s come here, then.”

“Eh? Are you sure?”

“Yes, I don’t mind.”

I feel miserable to select a café by my own preferences, but I liked that hamburger. We entered the café and were introduced to our seats. The café was crowded due to lunchtime, but there was an empty table for a two, so avoided waiting. I was going to take a sofa in high spirits, but I remembered the Koigasaki’s email.

[Give her the inner seat.]

“Oh, Hasegawa, please, take a seat there.” – I stopped and said to her.

“Eh? T-thanks...” – Hasegawa surprised, but thanked me.

“Please, have a menu.” – a waiter gave us a menu. I wanted to choose the hamburger already, but I remembered the email again.

“Oh! Hasegawa, please, choose first.”

“Eh? Ah, thanks...” – Hasegawa hesitated again, but she took the menu and made her choice.

“I’ve selected already, all right.” – she promptly returned the menu back to me.

“Well, I will...” – I was confused seeing the menu. I’m hungry, hence everything seems tasty to me. After a while, I decided to take Double Cheese Hamburger with Rice and Salad Set. Double cheese hamburger means it’s big, but it’s fine as I’m taking both breakfast and dinner.

“Have you selected? I’m calling for a waiter. Excuse me!” – Hasegawa called a waitress in a smart manner. Oops. I should have called for a waitress, but Hasegawa did it for my sake again.

“One ice tea, please.”

“Double Cheese Hamburger with Rice and Salad Set.”

“Thank you very much! I’m taking the menu.” – she said and left us along with

the menu.

The silence came again.

Okay, I've cleared the two items from Koigasaki's email, and now my manners are next. When we were on the date in Harajuku, Koigasaki said they are terrible.

A date is complicated. Hasegawa looks outside. I tried to think up a topic to talk, but I failed, and just looked at Hasegawa's face.

"Thank you for waiting! The ice tea and the double cheese hamburger with rice and salad set."

Great! They did the order earlier than I expected. The ice tea in front of Hasegawa, and the double cheese hamburger with rice and salad set in front of me. Also, I thought the double cheese hamburger will not be this big. Then I noticed Hasegawa is staring at my meal, with her mouth agape.

"I'm sorry, I've ordered so much..."

There is a huge visual difference between my order and her order. I thought I'd better be hungry.

"Why are you apologizing? I've ordered what I wanted to." – steadily said Hasegawa.

Next, I started to eat what I saw, remembering about manners. I tried to cut the hamburger smoothly, or to put it in my mouth nicely. Crap, my hand are trembling because I'm about Hasegawa might watching me.

"Oh."

With a ringing sound, I overturned my almost full glass with water.

"Oh, crap." – all the water that was inside my glass spreads on the table, and I started to panic.

"Kashiwada-kun, are you alright?"

I wiped the table using all tissues and napkins I had, and Hasegawa took out her tissues and gave them to me. A waitress came quickly and wiped out the table and the floor by a dish towel. Just why I'm doing such trivial misses? I'm

feeling so miserable I can't look at Hasegawa's face. After everything was cleaned, I vanished my double cheese hamburger with rice and salad set. It was too much for me in the end, so I was more than full.

During the eating, "yummy" slipped out from my side, so we didn't talk at all. Honestly, I was so immersed in eating I couldn't talk.

"I finished! I'm sorry for waiting!" – I started to pack my thing to leave the café.

"We don't have to go so quick, you better have a rest after the lunch..."

"No, it's alright, it's alright!"

Hasegawa had to wait while I finish eating, and I have no intent to keep her any longer, so I got up from my seat and went to the checkout. It would be good if I could pay her bill.

Actually, I had no money for the date, so I broke my depository where I've been storing my New Year money for fifteen years and get 10,000 yen from there.

I didn't really want to broke it because my parents told me to save that money for a rainy day. I have to live all this month using this 10,000 yen, so in fact, I don't have so much money to pay her bill. What a miserable man am I? I paid only my bill and left the café.

"Can I visit a restroom?" – said Hasegawa once we exited from the café.

"Oh, of course!"

Hasegawa went to a toilet, so I took out my phone and checked the time. Two hours earlier... It was less than one hour since we met, but I'm exhausted already. What the hell is this?

I started to type an email.

[To: Koigasaki Momo

Crap! I've committed a lot of misses! I have nothing to talk with her! What can I talk about?]

The reply came within a minute. She said she's traveling somewhere... Could it

be that she's free?

[Relax! I can imagine your nervous face. (smile) What about Hasegawa-san? Did she look angry when you were late? What did she say to you? How did she behave?]

[Nope, she didn't seem to be angry at all... I think. She gave me handkerchiefs, worried about me... She is an angel! ]

[So this time is enough for you to be given handkerchiefs and to be worried? I can imagine that as well, though... But if she's worried about you, she probably doesn't hate you. But be careful and try to avoid doing reckless things if you don't want your attraction points to decrease! Don't push on her! Behave like a classmate, so she could think that you are a good person.]

After that, Hasegawa returned, so I quickly closed my phone.

“I’m sorry for the waiting.”

“Not at all! Let’s go, then!”

“Did you decide where we go after this?”

“Yes, to Joypolis, if you don’t mind.”

“Sure.” – she said with her usual emotionless face. I’m remembering the last Koigasaki’s email. Be careful... To avoid doing reckless things... Do you have anything concrete? Thinking about this, I couldn’t speak to Hasegawa until we reached to Joypolis.

“Hasegawa, have you ever been to Joypolis?”

“Yes, I was here once long ago.”

It was unexpected. A calm girl like Hasegawa had visited such a noisy amusement park... It does not match with her image.

I bought two adult passports (entrance + free use of all rides) at the selling machine. Hasegawa was going to put money into the machine as well, but I quickly stopped her.

“Ah, I’ll pay because we came today to thank you for teaching.” – said and gave her one passport. I’m forgetting it all the time, but our purpose is to thank

her for teaching. Hence, I thought you won't be a gratuity if I'd not pay this much for her ticket. I got all my savings, after all.

"You don't have to, this is not why I came today..." – Hasegawa shook her head and taking out a money for a passport.

"I can't accept otherwise! Please, receive it!"

Crap, I'm so impressive!

"But..."

"No, it's all right if you take it!"

I have to push here.

"Well, if you insist... Thank you." – finally, she took the passport with an uneasy feeling on her face and we entered the park.

"Hasegawa, which one would you like?" – I asked Hasegawa showing an opened pamphlet to her.

"Well..." – Hasegawa became thoughtful looking at the pamphlet.

"Hasegawa, do you have dislikes among the rides?"

"No, I could ride anything so far."

"Eh? So you'd be fine with screamers and a ghost house?"

"I guess..."

Are there bounds of your almighty? That's Hasegawa for you. As for me, I'm fine with screamers, but I can't deal with a ghost house. For getting things worse, I noticed that I'm feeling not so good because of that hamburger. I thought it is all right after I finished the meal, but time changes things. I guess, I have to evade rough rides for now. My eyes were caught by a small rotating coaster.

"How about that one?"

"Okay." – Hasegawa agreed, so we went to the end of a line.

"Whoah..." – I uttered, so bad my stomach was.

"Kashiwada-kun, are you okay?"

“Eh? Ah, yes, I’m okay!”

Why would I utter such sounds on a date? In addition, I made Hasegawa worry about me. Get lost, already! Work better, my alimentary system! After a while, earlier than I expected, we got into the coaster. Of course, I sat near Hasegawa, but... Are not we too close? I can grab her hand from this distance, and the ride would not be the main event anymore.

Then, the ride started. I’m usually completely fine with this, but my stomach is ill now.

“Ooh...”

I thought I’ll endure such a small coaster, but in my condition, it feels like a hell. It was over within a few minutes.

... I should not have ridden it. I’m sincerely regretting it. Oh, I should better regret I’ve eaten the double cheese hamburger with rice and salad set. At least, I should have taken a usual hamburger set. However I can’t have Hasegawa notice that I’m feeling bad. I must endure this.

“H-Hasegawa, where would you want to go next? It... it was one of my favorites... So... We should go to those of your favorites...”

“Kashiwada-kun... Your face is pale. Are you okay?”

I might be not okay, if you can tell it just looking at my face. To say it honestly, I’m reaching my limits.

“I’m sorry... Can I... leave you for a moment? I’ll get back quickly...”

“Yes, sure.” – I tottered away looking for a toilet. After a while, I found a men toilet, quickly took a free room, and stood in front of the toilet bowl.

Oh, that’s harsh. I think it’s untidy, but I’ve squatted on the floor and tried to do that few times. What a disgusting feeling when you can’t vomit. I involuntarily took out my phone.

[To: Koigasaki Momo

Crap...I’ve eaten too much and now I feel bad, talking with the white telephone... And we didn’t ride a single ride yet! ]

And I sent it. Obviously, there is no way she can help me with this, but... Her reply came quickly.

[Your lameness is infinite... If you're that bad, you should ride anything, for starters.]

[But we have a ride-free passport! And we did not ride what Hasegawa would want.]

[What if things got worse and you will give that back in front of Hasegawa? You should better rest a while. If Hasegawa said she wants to go to the sea, you could leave Joypolis and walk to the sea.]

I read Koigasaki's email and rest for about ten minutes more in front of the telephone. I couldn't vomit, yet my condition had not improved and I couldn't return, so I just squatted all the time. If there is no sign of improvement, I probably should leave Joypolis without enjoying other rides.

However, if we'd walk to the sea, I'll have to speak to Hasegawa, and then the bad atmosphere will become even worse. I don't know how to speak to her already. Sure! Yesterday, I've read the article on the net, saying that I have to listen to her. I've put it my mobile memos.

[I saw an article yesterday. What Hasegawa would think of me if I'll only listen to her while we walking to the sea?]

I decided to confirm this with Koigasaki.

[Hm... Hasegawa-san is not a talkative type, right? It's fine if you'd listen to her, but try to not push on her, like, when you got up this morning, or, what did you eat today, or was a train crowded? Such a pointless questions are annoying. Watch her mood. Don't force her to talk what she don't like to. Use easy topics... like a... about the school, or junior high, I guess. Listen to her if she wants to say something, and so on.]

Okay... So just listening to her if obviously is not enough. I rested in the toilet for a while and returned to Hasegawa.

"Kashiwada-kun, are you feeling okay?" – she said with a worried voice.

"I'm sorry I had you to wait so long. Well, I'm feeling better."

It's not like I'm cured now, but I'm surely feeling better in comparison with me ten minutes ago.

"But your face seems to be not good, I think."

My face is still obviously bad anyway.

"Maybe you should better rest home today?"

It was the phrase I was afraid the most. It is the long-awaited date with Hasegawa, and I want to avoid returning home. Probably, she doesn't want to tag along with such a lame me... I looked at Hasegawa, and she was honestly worrying judging by her face. I blamed myself in my mind for that stupidity. Then I remembered the email I received from Koigasaki recently.

"Yes, I'm sorry... I'm feeling uneasy saying this, but I guess I can't ride anymore. So, if you don't mind, we could go to Odaiba Seaside Park instead."

"Eh? Are you sure, Kashiwada-kun?"

"Yes, I think I'll feel better under the onshore wind."

"Okay, then..."

Hasegawa agreed, and we left Joypolis and we headed for Odaiba Seaside Park.

The onshore wind at Odaiba Seaside Park feels so good, and I think I feel better now.

"Hasegawa, is it the place you wanted to visit?"

"Yes..." – contentedly answered Hasegawa. Her hair is flattered by the wind. We talked for a while, walking by the seashore. I was searching for the next topic to talk about.

"Hasegawa, do you like the sea?"

"Eh?"

"I thought, you wanted to visit the sea, because you like it."

Hasegawa did not answer the question, but looked somewhere into the distance. Shortly, she started to talk.

“I was here long ago. So, if you would ask me where I’d like to go, this is the first place I’d remember.”

“You had visited this place many times?”

“Yes.”

I remembered Koigasaki’s advice there. Listen to her if she wants to say something. I can’t tell whether she wants to say something, but she wants to talk... I guess.

“Long ago, did you mean your junior high?”

“No, before my grade school.”

“Huh... With your family?”

“Yes, I was here with my family.”

Hasegawa looks like she’s remembering something from the past.

“I had enjoyed being here, so I thought to come here once more time.”

“You have a friendly family.”

If she had enjoyed being with her family, so I thought they are friendly, but in that moment it seemed her smile was sad. Did I say something I should not have to? What if she had a friendly family, but now things are different? I remembered the Koigasaki’s email where she said to not force her to talk about things she doesn’t like.

She didn’t reply, so I decided this is what she would like to not talk about, so didn’t ask further. But I was surprised by sudden silence break.

“Kashiwada-kun, how do you feel?”

“I’m fine.” – remembered Hasegawa out of concern, but my condition is steadily improving indeed.

“There is a bench, let’s take a rest there.”

“Okay, thank you.”

We sat on the bench. Her concern makes me happy. Now I’m looking for a conversation topic. I had a question to Hasegawa.

“There is one thing I thought to be strange. Why did you come to the karaoke, when we invited you in June?”

I’m surprised she came today, but I was surprised back then as well. It seems like she’s putting other people aside, yet she agreed to come quickly. Why? Hasegawa started to think.

“I’m not sure how to tell you a reason.”

“Eh?”

“There is no particular reason. I had come because I was invited. That’s all.”

Came because you were invited? Does it mean that Hasegawa would come anywhere it she will be invited? By the way, she came today with no resistance.

“So if I’ll invite you again, will you come?” – I used this situation and asked a bold question. She was surprised.

“Eh... If you’re fine with someone like me...” – she said with no confidence in her voice. But I was happy hearing it.

“Let’s go. Are you feeling well?” – said Hasegawa looking at my face.

“Uh, yes, I’m fine now.”

I wish to spend at least a little more time with Hasegawa, but I guess we have nothing left to speak about. In addition, I can’t force her to walk so much, and my condition signals to me that I should better go home today.

After that, we walked towards the station, when Hasegawa suddenly stopped.

“Eh?” – she mumbled.

“What happened?”

“Whoa, is it you, Hasegawa-san?” – a young couple appeared in front of us, and the woman spoke to Hasegawa. They came closer.

“Long time to see you!~ I’m so surprised!”

She speaks as an old acquaintance of Hasegawa.

“M-Morishima-san...” – was the first word she said to that woman. But I was surprised seeing Hasegawa’s face. Could it be that she dislikes this woman?

“You hadn’t changed at all since the junior high. What a surprise!”

This proves that they are junior high acquaintances, however strange is that woman seems to be of the same age with us, but she wears raffish and opened clothes, completely different type than Hasegawa. Hasegawa’s face is pale, and she tries to avoid looking into that girl’s eyes. Then, she looked at me, from the bottom to the top.

“Are you on a date or something?”

Probably I’m seeing things, but she said it with looking down tone. The man beside her is obviously older, with a lot of black things... Crap. They are making fun of Hasegawa because of me. They would think she has a lame boyfriend, like “my boyfriend is better, I won”.

“You’re wrong, we planned to go by three of us, but one couldn’t come. It’s not a date by any means...” – I think, I overdid with excuses.

“Oh, I see. My bad, my bad.” – she coldly apologized. I don’t understand why, but I have negative feelings towards her. I can’t put it into the words, but I think I’m emitting an unpleasant aura. Moreover, Hasegawa is frightened by the woman.

“By the way, Hasegawa-san, are you still speaking with Sonoda-san?”

Hasegawa reacted and rose her head.

“I... am not.”

“I see... I emailed her once after the graduation, but she never replied.”

“Oh.”

“So you couldn’t contact with her too.”

Hasegawa’s face expressed many complicated emotions I had never seen, – a painful, frustrating face.

“Risa, let’s go.” – a man opened his mouth for the first time. He was obviously annoyed.

“Oh, sorry. Bye-bye then, Hasegawa-san!”

“Sure.”

The woman named Risa and her boyfriend have left.

“Hasegawa-san, are you okay?” – her face was still pale, and it seems she forgot how to utter a sound.

“Oh, I’m sorry.”

“Your face looks terrible.”

“Oh, is it?”

Hasegawa took out a handkerchief from her bag and wiped the sweat.

“Can I ask, who they are?” – I asked and looking at her.

I asked a natural thing I’ve been interested in, it rather would be unnatural to not ask.

“...” – Hasegawa is not replying. Crap, it seems I shouldn’t have asked.

“Oh, I’m sorry, you don’t have to tell me if you don’t want.”

“We used to be classmates... I don’t know how to put it...”

She talks despite the emotions on her face.

“It would be a long and boring talk.”

“I don’t mind at all. Of course, if it’s something you can speak about. Also, what about us to take a walk to unwind? It’s early now.”

“Well, okay, let’s do that.”

And we wandered around the station.

“Today is a hot day, but the wind makes it easier to withstand the hot.” – it was unexpected, but Hasegawa and I spoke about trivial things.

“You’re right, I’m feeling better owing to the wind.”

However, it’s not the story I want to hear.

“Morishima-san... that girl mentioned about Sonoda-san.” – Hasegawa suddenly changed the topic. I was surprised a bit.

“She is my friend from junior high school.” – Hasegawa relaxed again and spoke slowly. By the way, Hasegawa’s face was terrible when that Morishima-

san mentioned her.

“I see. You were close friends?”

“Yes... She was a bright and popular, and she always would speak to lonely me. She was a very kind girl.”

“Eh? What a good girl! She was the best your friend your middle school?”

I was surprised that she was alone, despite it might be rude.

“Yes...”

Hasegawa’s face became calmed, and wind played with her black hair. It seems she is remembering that friend.

“When I was a grade school student, I had to change my school due to father’s work. And I avoided befriending with anybody.”

“Changing the school in that age is surely hard.” – I was shocked a little.

“So you gave up making a friend because of the difficult childhood.”

“No, not at all. Simply I was a coward.” – easily said Hasegawa.

“But despite such my cowardice and coldness she would always speak to me.” – said Hasegawa with a slight smile. She must love her, I thought.

“However...” – suddenly, the smile vanished from Hasegawa’s face, and it became emotionless as usual.

“Because of her kindness to me, other girls from my class started ignoring her.”

“Eh? Eeeh?” – I was really shocked by that.

“Other girls from my class always told her to not get along with me, but she ignored that. In addition, she hid from both she was told to not get along with me and that she ignored that.” – said Hasegawa with deep remorse in her words.

“To not get along with you? Why would they say it?”

“I... don’t know, but... It seems they disliked me.”

Why did they say such things? Did Hasegawa do so something bad to them? I

doubt that so kind Hasegawa could do it.

“The girl who told that was the girl we just met, Morishima-san.”

“Eh?!” – I was severely surprised.

“That’s cruel! And now she would just come to you like nothing happened?”

“Morishima-san has a good appearance. It might be I did something bad to her without noticing it, and she began to think bad of me.”

I doubt Hasegawa could do that.

“What about your friend, what’s happened to her?”

“In the end, she stopped going to school.” – said Hasegawa with so sad face, I’ve never seen it before.

“It was my entire fault... If I would not there...”

“I don’t think so. I don’t think it’s your fault.” – I strongly rejected that.

“So she didn’t graduate from the junior high school?”

“She had barely enough attendance days to finish the school, and managed to enter a senior high school. Despite what I said to Morishima-san, I sustain the contact with her. She’s nice to me as if nothing happened.”

“I see.” – I understood her feelings.

“I’m sorry for a long dark story...”

“Not at all, it was me who asked for this.”

What should I do? Hasegawa has told me so much, and I have listened to her, but I don’t know what to say now! I can’t find right words! It’s not a story for what I could just give her a little praise.

Hey, me, it’s the worst to get silent right now! Yet I’m not sure what to say to her. I remembered my own junior high school life. I see... Hasegawa had bad experience too... Nope, her one was far worse than mine. However, we are the same in term of a bad past.

“Hasegawa.”

“What?”

“I think it’s a sad story, but thank you for telling it to me. I was happy.” – I said what I felt as is.

“I’m not sure how it would seem if someone like me says this, but... I think it’s not fault, Hasegawa.”

Hasegawa is listening to me silently.

“Well... I had a bad experience in my junior high, not as bad as yours, though. And it affects my life even now. So I think, I can understand your feelings a bit.”

“What kind of experience?” – Hasegawa asked with interest.

“Ah, well... A girl I liked backbit about me, and such... Well, it’s often seen in junior high, I guess, it’s nothing serious.” – I told about my trauma with a sore face. I never told anybody about this junior high trauma. I wish I could forget this bad memory. And I had no intent speaking about it now.

“Why? I think it’s more painful than what happened to me.”

She stopped, and looks at me with a serious face.

“I have never fallen in love, so I can’t understand a pain of it, but I think being rejected by someone you love is far more painful than I could imagine.” – said Hasegawa looking at me. Her face expressed that pain as if she talked about herself. Her words were enough for me. I was saved by them for a little.

We walked too far from the station, so we had to return to get on the Yurikamome. We didn’t say a word on the way back, but I felt this atmosphere is not bad, and I had no urge to talk anything either. Probably, reasons for Hasegawa to take some distance from others lay in her junior high school period. She blamed only herself, saying she had put a strain on her friend, and that because of her... If she thinks it was her fault, because she was there, then it might be a good reason to avoid being involved with anybody.

On the other side, Hasegawa became a class representative for everybody’s sake. The same I can tell about that karaoke, and of course, she came today to meet with me. I guess, deep in her heart she wants to be involved, to befriend with others.

I’m falling in love with her even more after I had to know that she is really

honest and kind person deep inside. I want to get closer with Hasegawa.

“Hasegawa, you know...” – I said, and Hasegawa reacted.

“I might be annoying, but I am absolutely sure that is was not your fault!”

Hasegawa opened her eyes wide. Hey, why did I say it just now? She might think I’m out of my mind.

“It might be my imagination, but I believe our classmates would want to befriend with you. So, well...”

I think Hasegawa can get friends in our class. That’s what I was tried to say, but I failed to finish the sentence. This is not business to say such things to her, I thought.

“Kashiwada-kun...” – said Hasegawa after watching at me for a while. She has a surprised face.

“Kashiwada-kun, you are...”

“Eh?”

“You’re a strange person, Kashiwada-kun.” – said Hasegawa and kindly smiled to me like she never did to me.

“Hase...gawa...” – I was surprised by that expression and was ready to hug her.

It’s going late, so we entered Yurikamome station to change stations later.

“This monorail... I have so warm memories of it.” – Hasegawa suddenly said.

“You used Yurikamome when you visited Odaiba with your family?”

“No, my father drove us.”

A strange reply. Why else would she use Yurikamome?

“I was here two times, aside from the visit to Odaiba.”

I used Yurikamome to get to the Comiket last year.

“Did you visited Odaiba alone?”

“I did... But not Odaiba, but Tokyo Big Sight.”

“Eh?”

Aside from Winter and Summer Comiket, what is held at the Tokyo Big Sight? But I can't match her image with Comiket at all. I craved to ask her, but I couldn't find right words after all.

Is Hasegawa an otaku? There is no way... No way!

When we arrived at the transfer station the Shinbashi, we had to part our ways.

“I'm sorry for all disturbance I caused today by my bad health.”

“Not at all...”

Today, I have talked about various topics with Hasegawa.

I could hear about her unexpected past. I was very happy to listen to her. I had a feeling that the distance between us decreased. I thought that if she told me so much, she definitely opened her heart to me. If I'd put it in attraction points, it would be not “love”, but above the “usual” at least. In date simulator terms, among five grades of “hate”, “dislike”, “usual”, “like”, and “love”, it should be “like”.

Therefore, I was blinded by what I've conceived of. I have planned to do an unbelievable, to invite Hasegawa to a new date.

“Ha...”

“Kashiwada-kun.” – she spoke to me at the same time, when I rose my voice. Her voice was louder, so she didn't notice I was going to speak.

“Thank you for today.” – said Hasegawa looking at me.

“Oh, it's me who have to thank you.” – actually, I was happy she thanked me.

“You paid for my passport, and... Also, you listened to me... I decided to try again making friends after hearing your words.”

“Eh?” – I wasn't sure what she is talking about, and looked at her.

“I had given up already, saying honestly. I thought I can't make friends anymore.”

“But today I have understood that I have to give an honest try to do it again.”

My thinking process halted at that moment.

“I think it’s owing to you, Kashiwada-kun. Therefore, thank you.”

“Oh... You shouldn’t...” – I tried to smile, but I couldn’t understand her. You’ll try to make friends?.. What will happen with me, then? Didn’t she consider me as a friend?

“Goodbye.”

“Yeah, take care.”

I had no power left to invite her to a date again. I just smiled her and waved my hand. I entered the train that will ride me home with the feeling of emptiness inside my heart.

What am I for Hasegawa? Is it insufficient to call me at least a friend? I was carried away by the fact we got closer, but wasn’t it my delusion?

I forgot even to email Koigasaki that I’m feeling bad, I just lean to the carriage’s wall in prostration. I remembered again and again what she said in the end.

# Chapter 3

[Kashiwada-kun... If it's you, I don't mind...]

Right now, a girl sits on my bed and says shameful things to me.

[Hinata!]

[Oh, no! Not so fast...]

A love scene with a bishojo started, when...

“You’re doing such ugly things from the very afternoon! Naoki you pervert!”

The door was roughly opened and my little sister Akari stares at me with anger.

“Owah!”

I was so surprised I thought my heart would stop, and I quickly closed my laptop.

“I told you to knock on my door before entering!”

“I can hear those your high anime voices through the wall! It’s a huge bother! And it creeps me out! Why would you play your eroge right from the afternoon on your summer vacation?! Is your life over?”

So I really should have used earphones. But they’re broken recently, so I must buy new quicker. I thought it would be if I set the sound volume low, but...

“Oh, cut it off. What do call an eroge...”

“I can see it!” – Akari pointed on the package near my PC of the eroge I’m playing right now.

“I though you’re relaxing at home once a while! You had a lot of a good time dating with girls! You are on dates outside, and playing eroge at home, just how far is your libido wide, you pervert!”

“A date?..”

“What are you trying to hide? I know it since long ago! Mama told me yesterday. Where a girl who would date with such a creepy otaku came from? I

can guess, though!"

"A date? Date... Mwa-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha-ha!"

"Eww, Naoki, did you lose your wits already?!" – Akari looked at me with fear in her eyes on the older brother who laughs rolling on the floor.

It has been a day since the date with Hasegawa. Yesterday in evening, I was thinking what I should write to her, when I got an email from Hasegawa.

[Thank you for today. Take a rest and get better.] – she wrote, and I replied her on high moods.

[Thank you for meeting with me today! It was very fun! I'm feeling better now!] – I replied, and in ten minutes she sent [Fine then. See you at the school.]

In the school... In other words, don't reply to me anymore. Also, she has no intent to meet during the summer vacation. Well, actually I understand that it's my paranoia, and she's only trying to be nice, but her emotionless answer broke my tension. As expected, after I sent to her [Yeah, thanks for worrying about me. Have a good summer vacation!] she never replied.

I couldn't get free from sadness and emptiness since then. I thought I did all I could, yet I didn't reach even "friend" level. What should I do now? How to get closer to her?

That's why I wanted to run away from the reality. I ran away into the 2D world. I have no money to play outside or buy new clothes, and I can't buy a new game, so I took out from the shelf the game which I liked the most in my junior high. The game itself is simple. You only need to understand its conquer information, one day is enough to clear the game. You can obtain the girl's emotions easily.

But the reality is different. How long, how much time I spent going towards that date, yet I haven't reached "friend" level. What should I do next in this unconquerable game? Still, the only thing left after conquering my game is knowledge of how vast is the difference with the reality, and it wasn't fun. (However, it might be I've tired of a game I had cleared many times) "Ha-ha... ha..." – I was tired to laugh anymore, and just looked at the ceiling.

"Naoki, something wrong with you, really..." – Akari looks at me with

suspicion.

“Senior high school has its difficulties, you know.”

“Huh? What was that? Are you making fun of junior high?”

“Not really.”

My junior high was dark too, actually.

“If something bad happened...” – Akari wanted to say something, but my phone rang so loud I couldn’t hear her.

“Oh... I’ll pick up the phone.” – and I received the call.

“Hello.”

Akari was interrupted and she’s obviously angry. She abruptly got up and left my room, slamming the door. Why she got angry all of sudden?

“Kashiwada, is it you?”

I wasn’t sure who’s calling because of Akari, but I recognized this voice. Koigasaki.

“Are you alive?” – I was astounded by this question.

“Why are you asking that? I’m not going to die that easily.”

“Why?.. That’s my question! You asked me to help during the date! I thought you died from the shock of the failed date when you stop responding!”

Huh? Could it be she worried about me?

“Oh... I completely forgot to reply, I’m sorry.”

“I did help you so much, can I expect some response from you?!”

I was in apathy, and I completely forgot about her.

“About that... Well, you were right partially. I failed the date and died. Not physically, though.”

“Eh? You did fail the date?!”

I don’t have a scale to rate fails and success of a date, so I guess if I’m satisfied – it’s a success, and a fail otherwise. Applying this scale, I can see that the date

is completely failed.

“You didn’t follow what I said and tried to go with that physical intimacy thing, and Hasegawa was disgusted?”

“No way!”

“So you went to Joypolis after that, and vomited in front of Hasegawa?”

“I am not!”

“So why do you call it a fail?”

“Well, we left to the Odaiba Seaside Park, and walked at the onshore...”

“Did you drown in the sea?”

“Why would I? No, we just talked...”

“Did you hurt her by saying something improper? Was she disgusted by your vulgar words? Did you make her upset by something awkward?”

“None of that!”

Well, actually, it was awkward a bit at the end when we interrupted the topic, but Hasegawa wouldn’t get upset by it, and she had talked in the end. So there was not an awkward atmosphere... I suppose.

“So what then? Were you so excited you spoke all the time and never listened to Hasegawa-san?”

“No. I spoke, of course, but I listened to Hasegawa as well.”

“Really? I can’t believe that Hasegawa would speak... Don’t you say you forced her to?”

“I don’t! I didn’t force her... I hope... When we parted, she even thanked me.”

“Are you serious? She thanked you?”

“Yeah, and she smiled.”

“Hasegawa-san? Smiled? Are you sure? She wouldn’t ever smile in school!”

Koigasaki’s words made me happy. She is right. Hasegawa showed me emotions anyone could expect from her, judging from her usual behavior. I’m feeling better understanding this.

“So what on the earth is the reason for you to say the date was failed?!”

“When we parted, she said, “I decided to try again making friends”.”

“What did you speak about?”

“A lot of things...But she said it along with thank.”

“I don’t really get the meaning of that phrase, and I don’t get why you are so depressed.”

“She said she will try making friends! In other words, I who was standing in front of her is not considered at least as a friend!”

“... Oh, you’re right...”

I made Koigasaki understand it, and returned my previous tone.

“However, she actually thanked you and smiled to you, right? I doubt she would do that to a man she dislikes. I don’t think Hasegawa is a person who would force herself out of concern.”

“You think so?”

“Of course! You were nothing but an ordinary classmate for her, and now your position improved! I don’t know everything, so I can’t say it for sure. Moreover, I don’t get why you are struggling. You did a lot, and you have good results, didn’t you?”

Koigasaki encouraged me and I’m feeling better. She’s right, usually if someone would see Hasegawa thanking somebody or smiling, he would be surprised. Koigasaki has always been scolding me, so I can tell that she praised me. Why was I so depressed?

“I see... I was too pessimistic...”

My good feelings arose with the feeling of regret.

“Crap... I should have invited her to a date when we parted.”

If her impression of me was good, she might have accepted my invitation. My spirits rose.

“No, that’s good you haven’t.” – Koigasaki stopped me instantly.

“Eh? Why?”

“I hope you remember that I left you with her saying I can’t come, and it’s just a good luck that she agreed to meet with you. If you will be alone from the start, things won’t go that easy. I think chances that she would reject are rather high. Well, you can try to invite her if you so confident enough you would not depress in case she refused.”

“I see...”

I think, what Koigasaki says is reasonable. Hasegawa agreed to go with Koigasaki and me. To agree on a date alone with me is one thing, and to agree to play by three of us together is completely different. I might have rushed things thinking that she would meet with me again, if she has agreed to go with me once. Also, I have a feeling that if Hasegawa would reject my invitation I never pick myself up from depression.

“Put off an invitation until you would be a little closer to her. It’d be safer to invite her when her impression of you will be better.”

“You’re... right...”

I’m way too fast. If I would break her flag, I will have nothing at all. Thus, I have to watch her for the time being. In other words, it’s impossible to play with Hasegawa during the summer vacation once again. I cannot meet with her until the school starts. I want to meet her now, and it’s even sadder to imagine I won’t meet her all the vacations. Could I endure this?

“So I guess I can’t meet with Hasegawa on the summer vacation...”

“You want too much! You already have your date alone with Hasegawa! Think about me! I’ve not contacted Suzuki-kun since then, and I can’t meet with him on the vacation.”

Koigasaki made a deep sigh. I can feel her sadness through the phone.

“Hey, is there an event where I can meet with Suzuki-kun? I have helped you a lot, so could you please arrange things for me?”

“It’s easy to say...”

Suzuki has no interest in Koigasaki, and if she would do something wrong he

might get a terrible impression of her. Also, it would feel unnatural if I invite him to play with Koigasaki and some extras.

“Why don’t you help me? A, I wish the summer vacation ends sooner... We are in different classes, but I still could meet him in corridors, I had seen him every day.”

I feel the same. I can’t talk with Hasegawa inside the school, but I can look at her.

“Yes, I wish the summer vacation ends sooner...”

In comparison with my junior high, when going to school made me depressed, I feel I’ve changed drastically. We sighed, had a talk about trivial things and the call ended.

\*

The following day, I was taking a meal with Suzuki in a MacD in Akihabara. We agreed to go shopping today. We had already visited the Gamers, Tora no Ana, Animate, and other shops, so we had to take a rest.

“Hey, Kasshi! Will you go to the Summer Comiket?”

“I don’t know... I want to, but I have no money.” – I said looking at my pocket. If I’ll go to the Comiket, I would do this with Suzuki.

“And you?”

“As for me, I want to go there very very much, but the second day of the Comiket will be a memorial service for the second anniversary of my grandfather’s death.

“Oh...”

If Suzuki can’t go, I’ll skip it too. I have nobody to go with me, and I have no money. Books of popular publishers are sold in Doujinshi\* shops afterward, so I can buy them there.

“By the way, you said you want to go to second day, not the third?”

“Yeah. I’m interested in Toho. Of course, I want to visit the third day as well, but I feel sad I can’t visit the second day... During that time, I’ll live at my

grandmother's place in the country, so I won't be able to visit both of them. On the second day, my favorite circle will sell a book that won't be sold by shops and sale sites, the special print for the Comiket!"

"Huh..."

"I really want it... But they say its author is a woman, and she sells extra sketches for women buyers. Well, it's impossible in both ways... I have to give up on the special book." – said Suzuki and started to slurp his juice loudly.

"Stop slurping already. Well... If I planned to go, I would buy it to you, of course..."

I have nobody to go with... What about to call friends from my junior high? Ah, I have no money, after all.

"Oh... This will change the topic, but had you visited My Home recently?" – I remembered what I wanted to ask Suzuki.

My Home is the maid café Suzuki showed me before, and at the same time, it is the workplace of Koigasaki and Sakurai-san. I thought, there is a possibility that Suzuki would see Koigasaki working wearing a maid outfit.

"No, I hadn't, why do you ask?" – I relaxed a bit hearing his answer.

The situation when Suzuki is running into Koigasaki isn't inconvenient for me by any means, but I afraid if Koigasaki would notice Suzuki, she would get nervous and may do something dangerous.

"I see... Well, it has no deep meaning. I visited that café earlier, and I thought you were too."

"Eh? Kasshi, were you there? I thought you weren't interested in a maid café. Who was with you?"

"I was alone."

"Alone?! Why? I should have invited me..."

"I'll do that next time."

I guess I'll have to warn Koigasaki if I'd go to My Home along with Suzuki. We had talked about nothing, and after a while, we left the MC and I returned

home.

\*

From the 10 o'clock the next day, I had the work shift. Am I spending my summer either home or at work?

"Good morning!" – I prepared and approached to the front, when I heard a voice.

Recently, I had one more person that kindly speaks to me, – this woman who greeted me, Watanabe Aya-san, we call her our workplace idol.

"G-Good morning." – I stuttered a little. It seems she is of the same age as me, the first year of another senior high school. She is a cute girl with straight shoulders-long hair. She's well dressed, and she puts less of cosmetics than Koigasaki, so-called natural makeup. She has a young face, not too big breast; she has everything that men would like about a woman. In addition, she has a sugary voice along with girlish gestures and way of speaking. She is friendly to everybody, therefore staff likes her, and she became an idol-like person. While most of the staff speaks curtly to me, (it might be my paranoia, though), only Yamamoto-san and Watanabe-san would greet me in a friendly manner. In the fact, most of my conversations with Watanabe-san are limited to greetings and related to work.

She greeted me and quickly returned to a conversation at the kitchen.

"By the way, Aya-chan, when will we do a matchmaking party? I'm waiting for it so long."

Today as well, the man I dislike, flashy Kato-sempai, speaks with Watanabe-san. Kato, you're on the shift today as well... Are you living at the work? Don't you have anything else to do?

"I'm always ready! Kato-san, what girls do you like?"

"Eh? What girls... I'll be glad if you bring girls like Aya-chan."

"Oh, what are you saying? By the way, all of Aya's friend are even cuter than me! And I have many friends!"

"Hey, wait! This can't be true! They are no girls cuter than Aya-chan! Also, a

girl's "cute" is always off. Don't call a girl cute is everything cute in her is her temper."

What a fatuous conversation! It's giving me creeps.

Also, it seems that Watanabe Aya doesn't attract me. She is cute for sure. I like tidy girls with black hair. It might be her aura "Am I cute, right? Hey, tell me that I'm cute!" is falling on deaf ears.

I'm not sure whether she is aware of it, but she refers to herself by the name, she bats all the time, her face constantly expresses bewildering, her lips resemble the duck... And she makes this constantly! If you ask her something, she would surely touch her mouth and tilt her head sideways! What for she could do that besides to make men like her? I can't stand this.

Thinking about this... I have no girls like Watanabe-san around me. Koigasaki is the embodiment of despotism, the girl I like, Hasegawa, is the contrary, and Sakurai-san is not the match.

I had heard their conversation today as well. The same situation as now was at my previous job, as always I stood aside having no chance entering to a talk, and just carried out my duties.

"I'm on a break!" – finally, Kato is taking a break. After a while, I noticed that I'm alone with Watanabe-san. It is not the first time I'm alone with a woman coworker, but it's my first time with Watanabe-san. I'm starting to worry for some reason. We never spoke, so awkward silence fell. By the way, Watanabe-san is a type who speaks to anybody, and would greet even me with a smile, probably she would talk to me now. Recently, I was immunized against women, yet I have no confidence to talk with a new cute girl.

But this time, I don't have to worry about this. And the reason is simple – Watanabe-san doesn't speak to me.

After a while, customer's stream slowed down. I thought this silence is strange, and turned back to Watanabe-san in the kitchen.

"..."

I was surprised. She played on her phone!

How can she do that during the job shift? I had never seen anybody doing this at work. Even that creepy-flashy Kato wouldn't do this. Watanabe-san noticed my glare and get her eyes off from the phone screen for a moment. It might be my imagination, but she looked at me with disgust, and returned to her phone as if nothing happened.

Oh, I realized it now. The reason why I am not attracted by Watanabe-san. She has no interest in me. Even today she never spoke to me despite she loves chatting. She usually speaks to any man regardless of his appearance; sometimes she touches them, expressing kindness. However, the way she acts towards me is completely different. I feel she greets me only because she wants all other think of her as of a nice to everybody.

I think, if I had no immunity against women, I would probably think she likes me when she acted lively to me. But I didn't like her because her attitude to me is different. Once I realized this, my mood deteriorates. Oh, I have to spend the time alone with such woman, I thought, when Kato returned from his break.

"I'm back!"

You saved me. This is the first time I thought about Kato this way.

"Oh, Kato-san, welcome!" – she instantly changed her mood and spoke to him. He phone is already in her pocket.

"About the matchmaking party..." – Watanabe-san returned to her superficial mode.

"What is it?"

"Will you invite Yamamoto-san?"

"Eh?" – Kato surprised by her request.

"Aya-chan, are you in love with Yamamoto-san?"

"Eh? What are you saying? I am not!" – Watanabe-san rose her high voice even more. Yamamoto-san is popular, as expected... He looks good, he's nice to the likes of me, he works well, and he is trusted by coworkers. Why such person exists? I guess, if he was on the shift today, I'd feel better. And Watanabe-san likes Yamamoto-san... I won't like if he would easily fall in love with a two faced

girl like Watanabe-san.

“Aya-chan, Yamamoto-san is hard, you know?”

“Eh?”

“He like his sister.”

“Eeh? Are you serious?” – Watanabe-san was surprised by his words. Although, I was surprised too. Oh, he did say that he has a sister of the same age as me.

“He likes his sister, so I think he won’t play with you.”

“Eh? No way... I’m shocked.” – I felt her mood fell. Yamamoto-san likes his sister... Well, he is kind, so I can understand he thinks about his sister. Yamamoto-san’s sister must be a cute girl. I’d like to see her.

After that, I took my break, and then I worked until six o’clock. When my shift was over, I went to the staff room, and found Yamamoto-san there.

“A, Kashiwada-kun, are you leaving?”

“Yes, hello. And you are starting from now, I guess.”

“Um. My shift starts from 6:30, but I came quickly.”

And we had a chat with Yamamoto-san. Kato’s words caught me up and I didn’t know whether his words are true or not.

“Yamamoto-san.”

“What is it?”

“How are your sister doing? Of the same age with me.”

“Oh, my sister... I wonder.”

“Eh? Something happened?”

“Oh, no... I just don’t know how she is doing. I have not spoken with her for a long time.”

Hasn’t he spoken with his own little sister? Why?..

Even someone like me speaks with that sister almost every day.

“Aren’t you on friendly terms with the sister?”

“Yes, we are not. Further to say, she seems to hate me... I guess...”

What a surprise. It’s hard to believe such a good person is on bad terms with own sister. If I had an older brother like him, I would be proud of him. Why could he be hatred by the sister? I doubt Yamamoto-san could do something bad to her.

“Oh, excuse me, I have to go now. Goodbye, Kashiwada-kun.”

“Goodbye.”

I want to know it, but Yamamoto-san went to work already. In addition, it could be inappropriate topic to talk to ask him next time. Like, why your sister hates you?! I can’t just ask such a thing. He might not want to talk about it. I left the work struggling about this.

Inside a train, I opened my phone. Koigasaki sent me an email when I worked.

[Kashiwada, will you go to the Comiket?]

I was surprised Koigasaki wants to get into the otaku’s world.

[I have no money, so I probably won’t... I’d like to, but I have nobody to go with me.]

[Don’t you go with Suzuki?]

Oh, I was right. She wants to know about Suzuki.

[Suzuki will be on a memorial service. But he said he wants a book, and complained he won’t be able to buy it.]

[Really? Azuki-chan invited me, so I though I’ll see Suzuki-kun there. What is the book he wants?]

She wants to make a chance to meet with him again... But that place is big and crowded, the possibility to not see him is rather high.

[Why are you asking? I don’t think you’ll understand even if I tell you.]

Suzuki wants a dojinshi shooting game of “Touhou Project” genre for male, which is sold on the second day of Comiket. That’s what I told to Koigasaki.

[The second day? Isn't it the 13<sup>th</sup>? It is when Azuki-chan wanted to go!]

[Like I said, Suzuki won't be there anyways.]

[I'm thinking to buy the book that he wants!]

I deeply sighed. Yes, Suzuki will be happy if Koigasaki would buy that book for him, and he would thank her. However...

[The second day... It's impossible for you. At the Only event is a few times more crowded than usually. On the second day, there will be a crazy throng of men, not as much as on the third day, but still a lot. Also, you won't find where the book is sold.]

[Eh? Is it that hard to find the book? Help me, then! (smile)]

[Help?..]

[Come with me. Do you remember how I helped you with the date with Hasegawa-san?]

Is she threaten me? But well, she surely helped me a lot before the date and during the date... Finally, I have no choice but to agree to help her buy the book at the summer Comiket. I have less than 1,000 yen left, so I will have to break my depository again... I'm happy to go to the summer Comiket, but my savings would decrease again.

[Well, I wanted to go but I had no fellow to go with. I guess I have no choice, so I'll go with you. By the way, if I remember correctly, he said that the author would draw a sketch for a woman buyer. I think Suzuki will be happy if you take a sketch too.]

[Eh, seriously? Okay! I'll buy the book and take a sketch for sure!]

Things go smoothly at now... Then I remembered one thing that makes me worry.

[By the way, you said you're going with Sakurai-san. Are you sure that I can go with you?]

Sakurai-san never emailed me since that strange message, she was very kind to me. What was that, I wonder? Was she in high spirits? Will her attitude change when I meet her again? Or she'll be a usual rude Sakurai-san?

[Why would you worry about that? She asked me whether I'm going to invite you.]

I was surprised by that email and re-read it. Sakurai-san asked about me?.. She demonstrated a good will towards me for the second time. She is like another person. I'm happy with her friendly attitude, but I don't know what's happening.

[I wonder why Sakurai-san got so sweet to me...]

[She got sweet to you? I think you've mistaken. (smile)]

I've mistaken... Is it really so? Indeed, she was nice in her email, but she wasn't nice when we met. Okay, I'll put it aside for a while. We'll go to the Comiket by the three of us. The doujinshi I've been interested in is sold on the second day. I've texted to Koigasaki to get ready to go to a crowded like a hell and hot like a hell place with a swarm of sweaty men inside, and thus we agreed to meet on August 13, at the Kokusai-tenjijo-seimon Station.

[I guess, we'll have to buy the catalog. It's a costly thing, you know? Around 2,000 yen. What about dividing the price among us? Ask that Sakurai-san.]

[The catalog? What is that? Can't we go to the Comiket without it?]

[We can, of course, but we won't know any whereabouts, and we'll get lost, so I think it's better to buy it. You are the one to get lost.]

[Hm... You could ask Azuki-chan by yourself. Well, okay.]

[Also, the seller of the book that Suzuki wants is a quite popular wall circle, so you never know when the books would be sold out. We should be there earlier, so let's meet at the six o'clock at the Kokusai-tenjijo-seimon Station.]

[Six o'clock? Do you mean... morning?]

[Of course!]

[Eh? Eeeeeh?! I don't understand! Why so early?]

Koigasaki overreacted, I think. Well, I'm used to this timing, but civilians may be surprised by such time.

[What for do you go there? We go because you want to buy the book for

Suzuki. And we have no idea of how much books they printer, and we don't know how quick they will be sold either. The author is a very popular wall circle. I guess we will buy if we'd come there in time.]

[Otakus wake up in early morning... Okay, then.]

Probably, civilians don't understand why we go to the Comiket on the first train. In fact, when I first visited the Comiket, I was surprised as well. Actually, even if you came early, yet you were slow, you can't call that participation in the summer Comiket.

[Memo for the summer Comiket:

What to take with you: Money (the more small change is the better); Cold drinks; A round fan and folding fan; Something to kill the time, such as a game. Also, make sure you had your breakfast that morning. Choose shoes, which make you easy to walk a lot. You must take a good sleep before the day of the Comiket, and restore your strength. I will ignore you if you'll be complaining that it's hot, it smells, you're tired, or you want to go home. ]

I put everything I remembered to the email. I'm so considerate...

[Eh? What is it? Are we going to mountains? Is it held in mountains? I thought it is at Odaiba.]

[Of course, it's at the Big Sight, in Odaiba. But don't you underestimate vastness of the Big Sight.]

[Is it so hard to buy a dojinshi?]

[You'll get it when we go. Like it or not.]

Once, I was sent to an infirmary with the heat stroke. I know what I'm saying. Then I asked to tell about the time and the place of meeting and about the catalog to Sakurai-san, and we agreed to go by three of us.

# Chapter 4

The second day of the summer Comiket, August 13.

I woke up at 4:30 AM to leave home before 5:00 AM. Luckily, I had no job yesterday, so I slept very well, and I woke up in perfect condition despite the time. I'm feeling sad remembering how I overslept the date with Hasegawa-san. I washed my face, had made a cup ramen on a breakfast, shaved, brushed my teeth, and put on my contacts. I didn't put wax on my hair, moreover, I didn't comb my hairs, but it's okay. Nobody would care my hair today anyways. And I didn't care of my eyebrows, that's okay too. I won't meet with Hasegawa today.

Yesterday, I packed my backpack with cooled cold tea, my wallet, plastic bags, paper bags, a fan, a towel, a commuter pass, and the Comiket catalog, so today all have to do is leave the home. It's already light outside, yet the streets are almost empty, only a few of people are running or walking a dog. I went to the bike parking at the station, parked it, and walked inside. The first train arrives at 5:07 AM, it's soon.

A man with a cart stands on the same platform, waiting for the first train. I can feel he is my comrade. I wonder are Koigasaki and Sakurai-san woke up... But we are not that close, so if I email her [Did you sleep?~] I'd annoy her.

I spent twenty minutes on the train before I arrived at the transfer station, Shinbashi, to change to Yurikamome. This is the second time I'm using Yurikamome. Well, I used Yurikamome to get to both Winter and Summer Comikets. Thinking about this, I arrived at the Kokusai-tenjijo-seimon Station within about thirty minutes, at 5:55 AM. The station is already crowded with people who walk to the Comiket. I passed a wicket, and I saw Koigasaki and Sakurai-san, who were waiting for me, despite the time we agreed is yet.

“Hello! Thanks for waiting! Hey, aren't you too early?”

“You said to go at six o'clock, and I worrying left my house very early, yet the roads are already full of a traffic jam! Why there are so many people outside this early?”

“The roads? Have you came by car?”

“Yes, my Papa drove me here.”

As I thought, she is a pet daughter. If he does not want his daughter to go through morning rush hour to the school, he would drive her to the Comiket too.

“I’ve come just now, too...” – said Sakurai-san. But something is wrong. Her tone is completely different from how she spoke in her emails. I see, she is friendly in emails, which means her attitude now is almost the same as it was at the cosplay event: cold, averting her eyes. I guess this was my imagination after all.

“Something different...” – silently said Sakurai-san to Koigasaki. What she’s talking about?

“You’re right! Hey, you, what is with your face and clothes today? You’re more creeping than ever. The true Akiba-kei style. How many days ago you touched your eyebrows?

So that “different” was about me?! Why Sakurai-san spoke to Koigasaki, not to me?

“Akiba-kei... It’s only natural to come to the Comiket with Akiba-kei!” – I replied.

“What are you declaring? Ew.” – said Koigasaki. Despite this early time, she did her makeup and hairs, and her clothes are perfect as usual. White no-sleeve ruffle blouse and pink mini-skirt. She might stand out because almost nobody wears such flashy clothes for Comiket.

Sakurai-san did not put on as much makeup and had not that well-done hairstyle, but she preserves the same quality as at the school. They did it in early morning... Girls are great.

“Hey, why is here so crowded from this time? Otakus are something...” – Koigasaki said looking around. I noticed some of the surrounding people noticed us. Maybe they thought, “then who are you who came here this early?” I wish you don’t talk that loud.

“No, Koigasaki, it’s too early to surprise.”

“Eh?”

Along with the human stream, we reached the Big Sight. Koigasaki has noticed something.

“What is that queue for?”

We came if front of the long snake-shaped queue.

“It’s for entrance into the Big Sight, of course.”

“Eeeh?! Why there has to be a queue to enter the Big Sight?” – Koigasaki was very surprised by the crazy number of people.

“It’s unbelievable. Does it mean they all are Japanese otaku?”

“I think there are more of otaku, actually.” – I quietly answered to excited Koigasaki.

“Why here is so crowded, if we came on the first train?” – Koigasaki had hit the nail.

“Wait, will we have to stay in the queue under the sun all the time? I can’t believe...”

“That’s why I told you to prepare things.”

We just stood in the queue, and Koigasaki has tired already. I’m starting to worry.

“Oh, Kashiwada-kun, did you bring the catalog?”

“Ah, yeah.”

I quickly took it out from my rucksack and gave to Sakurai-san. We agreed that I’ll buy the catalog, and they will give me money.

“I have read it thoroughly, so you may have your time reading it.”

I thought if we would come here early, we would have to stand in the queue for a long time, so they can read the catalog during that. But I haven’t finished the sentence, when Sakurai-san started to turn catalog’s pages quickly.

“A-5... Ah, here is it!”

“So you have checked the room number of the circle you want to visit.”

“Of course! It’s the basics! However, I may find in the catalog many other circles I’d like to visit... Ah, I should have taken over the catalog executive! Could I read it until our turn came?..” – Sakurai-san looks at the catalog with a furious look. This is the first time I see her such desperate.

Hey, she is scary... She is not kind! Did I imagine that email?

“Ah, this circle is on the Comiket too?! Crap, I didn’t check them!”

She is way more passionate with the Comiket than me!

“She is not the Azuki-chan I knew...” – Koigasaki is scared of sudden change in Sakurai-san’s attitude.

“Eh? Don’t say that! I’m as always! Don’t be afraid, Momo-chan!” – Sakurai-san replied with a kind voice, yet she stares at the catalog only, and she continues to check non-stop.

“Ah, I forgot, I’m sorry! Here’s the money for the catalog!”

“Me too.”

They took out their wallets and gave me the third of the catalog price. It’s fine for Sakurai-san, but Koigasaki wants to visit only one place, I feel uncomfortable taking the money from her. But I’m an Insolvent King, so I have no choice. I’m sorry, Koigasaki.

“You could read the catalog too, from the behind.”

“But there is only one room I’m interested in.”

“There are other hints for the Comiket.”

There are warnings of events, reports of the previous visitors, the map of the Big Sight and the like. I remembered that there are many pages, which are must read in good time.

“I see. By the way, isn’t the queue stalled? What is happening?”

As Koigasaki noticed, the queue has not progressed for a little bit.

“Well, it will progress soon, just wait with patience.”

“Patience? Ah, it’s hot!”

I and Koigasaki, and Sakurai-san as well, are wiping out the sweat.

“When you say it’s hot it becomes hotter! Don’t say it’s hot!”

“Don’t you say nonsense!”

The time has come, and I took out the round fan from my rucksack and used it to myself.

“Oh, fan me too!”

“Do it with your fan.”

“I forgot my fan.”

“I did say to bring one, right?”

I have no choice, then. I fan myself and Koigasaki, and Sakurai-san as well.

“Heyyy!!”

“Eh?”

“The wind turns the catalog pages! Stop it please!” – Sakurai-san got angry on me. I thought she would be fine.

“I’m sorry...”

As I thought, her attitude had not changed at all.

“By the way, Koigasaki...” – I noticed her feet.

“Didn’t I tell you to wear boots for long walking? Why would you pick up sandals?”

“They are so cute! Also, they are easy to wear!”

Yes, Koigasaki wears pink sandals with a flower.

“Easy to wear? Are you sure your feet will be fine after long walking?”

“I think, I’ll be okay... They are flat, besides I often wear them during shopping with no problems.”

“Comparing a usual shopping with a summer Comiket will play against you. Change to sneakers.”

“I have no sneakers!” – said Koigasaki and sighed out.

“Say, how long we have to wait until we got inside the Big Sight?”

“I wonder. The opening is at 10 AM, though.”

“So long?! What we have to do all this time?”

“That’s why I told you to bring a game! Did you bring something?”

“I have no games! I returned the DS to you... Oh.” – said Koigasaki and took out something from her bag.

“I’m immersed in Gree recently.”

Gree is a website for playing free mobile phone games. I’ve registered there and playing games there from time to time.

“Kashiwada, question! Answer quickly, only “yes” or “no”! Do you always have plans for weekends?”

“Eh? What is this all of sudden? I thought you’ll play games.”

“Hurry up and answer!”

I lingered, but then I answered to her question.

“... No.”

“Next. Have you dated with somebody?”

“What is this? No.”

“Do you have a job?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have at least ten friends who you can speak to freely?”

“T-ten?! No way. No.”

“Are you in love with somebody?”

“Eh?..”

It’s “yes”, but I could not answer for some reason. Koigasaki knows the answer for sure, but I didn’t tell Sakurai-san that I have a girl I like. Probably, Sakurai-san doesn’t care a bit whether I like someone or not. It’s only me who cares... Besides, she’s immersed into the catalog.

Slap~

“Eh?” – I turned my face to the source of the sound. Sakurai-san dropped out the catalog and stares at me.

“Oh, time out! Next, had somebody confessed to you?”

Koigasaki got angry with me because I didn’t answer, and reads the next question. Probably, she picked “yes”, because she knows the answer. I cast a glance on Sakurai-san again. She picked up the catalog as nothing happened, and continue checking the circles.

“N-no...”

Koigasaki has read few more questions.

“Oh, the results! [Your level of the reals\* (riajuu) is 20%! Let’s start with approaching to the person of opposite sex. You can meet your person in various places.] Heard that? That’s low!”

“Huh?!”

I suppose it was a quiz game from Gree to detect the reals. Koigasaki laughed looking at me.

“By the way, mine was 70%!”

“Crap...”

I thought I had a few “yes”... Koigasaki did a few more Gree quizzes. I’m “a popular guy” for 70%, “worthless” for 70%, my period of popularity waits for me in my “42” years old, my estimated lifetime is “38” (isn’t it a contradiction?), my reason of death is “suffocated by a candy”, and “3” people would cry if I die.

It can’t be right! Where are those answers from?

“Oh, I tired. By the way...” – Koigasaki put her phone into her bag.

“You tired by estimating another person?.. It’s hot, but...”

At this moment, I noticed an incredible.

“Koigasaki, your head...”

“Eh?”

“Haa! Momo-chan!” – even Sakurai-san, who was immersed in the catalog, couldn’t ignore that.

“What about my head? What with it? Kya!”

Koigasaki took out a hand mirror from her bag, and screamed when she saw her head. Her usual strong makeup spread due to sweat.

“Momo-chan, your face is so beautiful!”

“Nooo!” – Koigasaki screamed and quickly started wiping her makeup with wet tissues (with deodorant effect, apparently). And she... hides half of her face with her hand.

“What are you doing?”

“Well... I have no makeup anymore...”

“What are you saying this late?”

“I want to see Momo-chan without her makeup!”

“No way! I can’t! Seriously, I can’t do that... I’m ugly with no makeup! Oh, what should I do, I can’t do a makeup right here...”

Many times, I saw young gyaru fixing their makeup right in a train. Koigasaki is a gyaru too, but she is rather sensible gyaru.

“Are you going to do that all the time today?”

Koigasaki gave up and slowly lowered her hand. It was the first time I saw Koigasaki with no makeup.

“Hey, Momo-chan, you’re cute with no makeup on!”

“Don’t do it, Azuki-chan, I don’t need consolation.” – Koigasaki hanged her head all the way down and looks in distance.

“I think it’s way better than your glossy thing.”

Koigasaki’s face is cute with even without makeup. Her skin is surprisingly white, and her eyes are big enough without decoration around her eyes. She is definitely cuter by herself, without makeup.

“K-Kashiwada, you too? Don’t say unreasonable things! It could not be

possible for me to be nicer this way!"

"I don't know about Sakurai-san, but do you think I would console you?"

"That's true..."

Maybe it's too hot, so Koigasaki's cheeks are red even with no cosmetics.

"By the way, didn't you just say "glossy"? What was that? It's annoying! I'm so annoyed blood got to my cheeks and it's hotter now! It's all your fault!"

Are you embarrassed?..

"By the way, it's really hot." – said Koigasaki with a dead man voice after she tired to rant and rave. Of course, it's hot, and your tension warms you even more.

But honestly, we are on the edge. I tucked my shirt's sleeves up to the shoulders, like a man at those festivals. (However, concrete seems to be reflecting sunlight and my skin hurts. I realized that opening the skin was a wrong choice). Koigasaki obviously feels hot because of her hair, so she pulled hair together into a ball in a higher position. Also, it seems she intends to take away my fan, but for now I'm using it to myself. Sakurai-san gave up and applied a cooling gel sheet on her forehead despite we are not alone here. This is how bad we felt. How long have we waited?

"Oh, my sunblock was wiped... I should have brought a sunshade. I'll burn..." – very silently said Koigasaki. Sakurai-san embraces the catalog with both hands. I don't know has she checked all circles she was interested in, or simply gave up before that, or cut the rooms she will go to.

"Sakurai-san, are you done with the catalog?"

"Yes..."

"Give it to me, then. I'll give it to you if you'd want to see something again." – and I reached my hand.

"Eh? Are you sure? It's heavy."

"That's why I'm taking it."

"Ah, thank you..." – I took it from her, and she averted her eyes from me. Eh?!"

Did I do something annoying? I wanted just to take care of her, why would she get angry with me? But it's too hot to think, and my mind power is low. We were in high spirits recently, so no wonder we all tired. After that, we had been silent, we had been playing on our phones, we had been talking, waiting for the queue to progress.

When four hours passed since we are standing in the queue...

“Welcome! The 80<sup>th</sup> Comic Market is opened!” – declared an announcer, and sounds of clapping are heard.

“Finally! The opening!”

“Eh? The opening?”

We clapped with everybody. Then, the queue progressed quickly, and we got in the Big Sight. I couldn't say a word because of my emotions.

“Finally! Finally we are inside! Hah, hah...”

“Koigasaki, aren't you breathing too fast?”

“No! It seems oxygen is lacking here.”

Well, I can feel something like this too, but it's not that bad as for me. This place is vast, but also very crowded.

“Oh, excuse me! I'm sure I can buy the book I want or not since its publisher is popular, so I have to be hurry! We'll contact by phone!”

“Oh, okay!” – Sakurai-san quickly runs away to the western hall.

“I wonder what kind of doujinshi Azuki-chan is longing for?..”

“I don't think you have time to relax now. Who knows will we be able to buy the book for Suzuki. Let's go.”

“What? We came this early and still we can miss it?!” – Koigasaki surprised, but she followed me quickly. I've checked where is the circle, so I'm heading right there.

“It's a popular wall circle, so we may have to line up again.”

“Eh? Wall...circle? What does that mean?” – Koigasaki didn't understand what I said, and go ahead, leaving Koigasaki behind me. Looking at the map, I'm

making my way to the room of the circle, which Suzuki is interested in.

“Hey, I want to fix my makeup in a restroom first!” – said Koigasaki.

“We have no time for this. If we won’t hurry the book might end up being sold out! If you fine with it...” – I said on the walk. When we found the circle, there was a queue already. I looked at Koigasaki. She was astonished by the line full of men.

“What a queue...”

“Well, it’s really indefinite whether we will buy it.”

“Eh? No way! Even if we came this early...”

One of the books I wanted was published by a popular circle as well, so I’d want to buy it, but I can’t leave Koigasaki in this full of otaku queue, (I’m an otaku too) so I decided to stay here. Luckily, the book I want is not a limited Comiket edition, so in the worst case, I probably can buy it in an Akihabara’s doujinshi shop on the way home.

“By the way, where is this queue ends?”

“Outside. We have to go outside.”

“Eh? But we waited so long to enter inside! And we have to go out again?”

In case if you want to buy something from a popular wall circle, you have to go out and find the end of the queue there. Along with us, a lot of people are going outside. When I went out and started to look out for the end, I realized something bad.

“Koigasaki?!”

I lost Koigasaki from my sight. She was nearby when I walked here, but it was crowded at the entrance. I can’t find her in the crowd anymore. I took out my phone and called her.

“Currently, the phone line is overloaded...”

What a crap. I can’t call her because it’s too much of people. I tried two times more, but I heard the same announce. Right now people are lining up into the queue, so I sent her [line up in the queue] and lined up too. Koigasaki has not

replied, so I dialed her few times in the queue, but no good. I hope she lined up in the same queue...

After a while, I entered the building. My turn is soon. I thought, what would I do if the book will be sold out when my turn came. I spent more than thirty minutes standing in the queue. When the person in front of me has done buying, the nightmare revived.

“Ah, we sold the last copy of the Special Edition for the Summer Comiket.” – one of the girls who is assisting with the sales said it to another person. Sold out?.. She said, the Special Edition?.. I hope I was misheard. Then, my turn has come. The place where the book should have piled up was empty.

“The Summer Comiket Special...”

“We are sorry, the Special Edition is sold out.” – said the girl in a businesslike manner.

“Sold out...”

“We are sorry.” – sincerely apologized the other girl. I could move... Ah, all we did today is now burst like a soap bubble.

“We are terribly sorry, we did not anticipate that so many customers would buy the book. We apologize considering how long you have to wait in the queue.”

Probably she noticed that I’m shocked and apologized again.

“It’s... okay...” – it was hard to voice a sound.

The girl who apologized to me is not a match for a male-oriented dojinshi selling space, she is very nice and well dressed. Also, she looks young, probably she is a little older than me. She has shoulder-length hair, a tidy big sister style. I guess, big wall circles can afford such a beautiful girl to assist sales. I thought it for a second.

“Something happened?” – spoke to me a businesslike girl. I have many people waiting for their turn, so I should not impede them standing in the selling space.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I’m not buying anything this time.” – said to the girl. Suzuki is a fan of this circle, so I think he has all already published books.

“We are honestly sorry.” – deeply bowed the previous girl to me seeing I’m going to go.

Despite the shock, I have to decide what to do next. I could buy another book that Suzuki would like, but I’m not sure I can select it, because my preferences are slightly different (I have no “lolicon” parameter). Also, he said he will buy new issues of Summer Comiket when he will reach Akiba, so there is a possibility of me buying something he already has or something he wouldn’t like, therefore I should not buy his souvenirs.

It would be great if Koigasaki managed to buy the book before me. I thought about things for a while, when I noticed that my phone is vibrating. The screen has the sign [Koigasaki Momo] on it.

“Hello!”

“Kashiwada? Oh, I finally reached you!”

“I tried to call to you many times, too.”

“I too. Did you buy the book?”

“No. And you?”

“No way... You couldn’t buy it too?! I heard they are sold out just now.”

That means Koigasaki was behind me in the queue...

“I can’t believe it. We have done so much and it was for nothing!..”

I can feel through the phone that Koigasaki is shocked. She came to the Comiket only for the book, so she must be shocked more than me.

“Where are you? What are you going to do next? I’ll go to make a round of rooms I wanted to.”

“Eh? Hm... I’ll go to the bathroom, and take a rest after that. It’s hot and I’m tired already.”

“I see. I’ll call you when I finish with shopping. It would be bad if phones won’t work again, so email me the place where you will rest.”

“Okay. Bye.” – said Koigasaki with a sad voice, and ended the call. Her voice was slack, it seems she was really shocked. I was worried about Koigasaki, but

then I remembered my own objectives, took out the catalog from the rucksack, and quickly walked away.

I took out my phone to see the time and found an email from Sakurai-san.

[Where are you now?] The email has come five minutes ago, so I quickly answered her about my whereabouts, sending the number of the closest room.

[I'm going there, please wait there!]

She replied promptly, so I waited there, and Sakurai-san came on the spot.

“You’re fast.”

“I was near. And where is Momo-chan?”

“She is in a toilet. She said she will take a break after that. And we agreed that I’ll call to her when I finish with my shopping.

“I see. The thing is my phone is discharged, and can turn off any moment. And... I’m... May I go along with you?”

“Eh?”

She wants to... go along with me?

“Oh, sorry, I was doing Koigasaki’s errand, so I didn’t buy the books I wanted, and I’ll go for them from now on.”

“Y-yes, I figured that much... And I’d like you to take me with you...”

Does that mean Sakurai-san will go with me to visit my places? Really?

“I understand your concerns, but if my phone will die, it would be hard to find each other, if we agree to meet somewhere, crowd may hamper, so I thought it would be safer to walk together... Ah, one more thing. I didn’t buy everything I want yet, so I’m sorry, but I’d like you to accompany me, it would be still good after you finish your shopping.”

Yes, it’s safer to walk together if her phone is about to die. And she has not finished her shopping, so she can’t just go to rest with Koigasaki...

“But can you walk with me all the time? What if your books will be sold out?”

“Well, I already bought what I wanted to buy from wall circles, so that’s okay.

I have to buy the rest from smaller circles, so I don't think I have to hurry."

"But the books I want to buy are the type you don't like, for males..." – I remembered she was shown an erotic doujinshi by the boys from a manga researcher's club.

"Ah, um... Don't worry about that. I had no immunity against that... lewd things, so I received moral damage, but I have the immunity now!"

O-oh... So she's fine with erotica now. First of all, she won't be able to buy doujinshi at the Comiket if she wasn't fine. Okay, then.

"O-okay, I guess."

I felt uncomfortable a woman will come to know my sexual habits, but it can't be helped in this situation.

"Great! Consider me as air and continue your shopping."

How can I consider you as air? Okay. I must buy a book today. I'll try to buy it quicker, and I won't read it now, so I sluggishly agreed. It would be a big deal if Sakurai-san saw the contents. However, it's not a very erotic book, so I could read it there, I think...

I walked off to the circle I'm interested, reading the map. Popular books I'll buy later at doujinshi shops in Akiba, so I have to go around small circles now.

I found the circle, and noticed the book I wanted to buy.

"This book, please." – I gave the book to an assistant.

"Thank you very much."

I took the book and quickly put it into the rucksack.

"Kashiwada-kun." – Sakurai-san looks at me, and her eyebrows are strained.

"Eh?"

I bought the book because she said do not mind her. What's wrong now?

"Are you sure it was fine to buy a book without checking its contents?!"

"Eh?.." – she pointed completely different thing, so the question mark popped up in my head.

“I said to forget about me! What if you buy something just because it has a nice cover, but arts inside will be completely different? What if you buy a manga but it turns out to be an art collection? What if you intended to buy an adult edition but end up buying an all-ages edition? It would be sad, won’t it? You should check book’s contents before buying it!”

“O-oh...”

Yes, I completely agree with her... But isn’t she trying to care about me?

“Don’t mind me, and buy whatever you want. Don’t waste the Comiket.”

“Yeah... I glad you say it, but I can’t completely ignore you.”

She may say anything, but she would be disgusted when I take an erotic book. “Whoa, what an ill interest, Kashiwada-kun!”, or something similar she would think for herself.

“You will go with me to buy my books, so we are even! Don’t be reserved because of me! Moreover, ever if you... buy an erotic dojinshi... I won’t be disgusted! Because the most half of dojinshi are erotic!

“E-eh?” – I wasn’t ready that Sakurai-san would say this...

“And I understand! You’re reading erotic books because you love those characters! I know it because I’m the same. So please, don’t mind me!”

Sakurai-san blushed, yet she could say it.

“T-thanks. If you say so such, I won’t worry about your presence.”

I though any girls would be disgusted seeing 2D erotica, saying that it’s disgusting, unbelievable, call me a pervert or such with disdain like Koigasaki... But it seems the same otaku can understand my feelings. I’m impressed a little. I don’t have to hide my otaku things from her.

“Kashiwada-kun?” – I’ve immersed in thoughts, and Sakurai-san’s voice returned me back.

What I’m thinking about? I’m in love with Hasegawa only, and even if she does not think about me as a friend, she might open her heart for me one day, and I decided to work for that!

Moreover, Sakurai-san earlier looked at me with disdain, so I must not imagine things.

“Sorry, I was off because of hot.”

“Are you okay? Let’s go to the next circle quicker, while you’re fine.” – said Sakurai-san with a smile. I think it was the first time she smiled at me. I find her smile beautiful.

After that, we visited few circles that I was aiming for. I did like she told me, I didn’t act like I’m watched, so I’ve been looking inside the books as well. If I liked a cover, I would look inside, and then decide to buy it or not depend on its contents. However, I still was embarrassed, because I’d want rather to not show my fetishes.

“I’m done here, Sakurai-san. Let’s go to the next circle...” – I said to Sakurai-san, but she was immersed in reading some book. It was the book I just bought, – a doujinshi for adults.

“S-Sakurai-san?!”

“Ah, sorry! You’re done, right? Let’s go, then!” – she noticed my voice and quickly returned the book back. Did she read it because I bought it, or it’s just she is interested in it? It’s a doujinshi based on an anime for adults that finished recently, and the hero forces the heroine... along the plot.

“May I...”

“What?”

“Kashiwada-kun, do you like that?”

“Eh? Ee-eh?!”

By “that” she means that doujinshi, I guess. She told me earlier that she won’t be disgusted, but she is disgusted after all, I thought at first. However, that thought vanished at once when I saw her face. She is blushing, yet she is curious and serious at the same time. It’s not a disgusted face by any means.

“Do you like when... situations where... by force?” – she stares into my eyes.

“Eh? Eeh?! It’s not like that... I like its manner of arts... That’s all.”

I made some kind of excuses. Of course, I bought that dojinshi because I liked its arts, but besides that, I liked that situation. But admitting that is the same as revealing own sexual habits. I can't do such an embarrassing thing. What is it, a shame play?

"I understood. I'm sorry asking a strange thing."

"It's nothing."

Good girl.

"Koigasaki didn't send an email yet..."

"Eh?"

"I told her to send me an email with whereabouts of the place where she will rest, for the case phone won't work again. But I can't see her email yet."

"I think, a toilet is crowded, but it's too long in any way. Maybe you should call her?"

"You're right."

I agreed and called to Koigasaki. I thought the line might be overloaded again and it won't connect me, but she picked up the phone quickly.

"Hello."

"Koigasaki, where are you now?"

"Well... Do you remember where the circle we lined up to is?"

"Eh? Yeah."

"I'm inside their room now."

"Eh?!"

Inside their room?! What's happening? Usually, only circle personnel is allowed to be in a circle's room.

"Did you finish with shopping?"

"No, not yet."

I've done my shopping, but Sakurai-san is not.

“Then, please come to the room when you are done, I’ll explain everything here.”

“Really? It might take some time.”

I can imagine how many circles Sakurai-san is planning to visit, judging how passionate she was with the catalog.

“Oh, don’t worry. Take your time.”

It seems owners of the circle allowed her to be inside the room. I don’t get anything.

“Okay, see you later.”

“Eh? Um.”

And Koigasaki dropped the phone.

“What Momo-chan was saying?”

“I don’t really get it, but it seems they let her inside the room.”

“Eeeh?!”

“She said us to come there when we are done with shopping.”

“What does it mean?”

“Well, she said she will explain it when we come. I don’t know either. I’ve finished, so I’ll go around with you now.”

“Eh? But Momo-chan...”

“She said we don’t have to hurry.”

“She said... Okay, we’ll ask her later. Kashiwada-kun, you bought everything you wanted to?”

“Yeah. And I have no money anymore.”

Probably, I’ve used up around 10,000 yen. I’m short now, so it would be bad if I’d use that further.

“Okay, let’s do that.”

Sakurai-san took out the map of circles, and goes to the selected room. I’m

following her silently. I'm interested a bit of what kind of dojinshi Sakurai-san will buy.

After a while, we came to a room. According to the poster, it's about the popular manga for women (for fujoshi, to say more precise) about anthropomorphic prefectures and cities of Japan.

"Ah! The new issue!" – slipped out from Sakurai-san's lips, and she quickly looks inside and buys the book. I cast a glance on the book cover – yes, I was right, it's about BL (boy's love). So Sakurai-san is fujoshi after all. After she bought the book, she turned back to me as if she remembered something.

"Are you disgusted?"

"Eh?"

"Well, now you know that I'm a fujoshi..."

"Not at all. I suspected that you are."

"Eh?!"

"Do you remember when we were at Nippori? You said you have to go to watch Thunder Nine, and you went home. That anime is popular among fujoshi."

"Oh, yes, I remember..." – she remembered and she's embarrassed a bit.

"As you said to me, I can say the same to you. Don't mind me and buy whatever you want. I have a fujoshi little sister, so I don't care."

"Really? Thank you!" – said Sakurai-san with an awaken face.

"Whoa! I didn't expect to see Kanagawa uke book!"

"Tokyo clumsy seme! I'm not the only interested in him..."

"This circle's Aomori shota is so-o cute!"

"Yamanashi x Kagawa? I thought they are too perverted, but it's sold..."

Sakurai-san was excited and used some unknown words, buying may dojinshi based on this BL manga. Those are manga for adults, but she buys it with no hesitation.

“Kashiwada-kun, aren’t you disgusted, really?” – asked Sakurai-san looking at my face, after she finished her shopping.

“Eh? Not at all!”

I’m sorry, but I did a little. But not by that fujoshi thing, it’s your excitement.

“I’m sorry, the next one is the last.”

“Don’t worry about me!”

Sakurai-san’s “the last” was a room of an anime, that is surprisingly popular among men too. She buys dojinshi about two main yuri\* heroines. I thought she in only interested in BL, but it looks like she likes yuri genre as well. Which means, the girls who love yuri actually exist... Judging the cover, it’s a relaxed book for all ages, and its arts are cute.

“This one, please.” – I bought it too; I like this genre, and I like this anime. Sakurai-san already left the room. She looks at me with a surprised look.

“Eh? Kashiwada-kun, do you like this anime too?”

“Yeah. And you, Sakurai-san?”

“Yes! But I have nobody around me who would like it... This genre is popular among men, so my friends are not interested in it. That’s why I’m happy!” – Sakurai-san looks at me with sparks in her eyes.

“I’m surprised so see a girl who would like this anime.”

“Really? Ah, Kashiwada-kun, will watch the anime film in the autumn?”

“Yes, I’d like to.”

I’d like to, but I haven’t decided who will go with me and when I’ll go. If Suzuki would like to, I’ll invite him.

“Ah, so... Then... That film...”

“Eh?”

“Well... What about to go with me?” – Sakurai-san asked avoiding looking at me.

“Eh?!”

“N-no! It’s not a d-d-date, or something... I have nobody to go with me, so if you don’t mind going with me...”

I was invited to the film by Sakurai-san.

What kind of spicy situation is it? I thought she doesn’t like me at all, and now she’s inviting me to the film...

“B-b-but if you have somebody to go to the film, then it’s okay.”

“No, I’m going with you! I didn’t decide who I’m going with...” – I said directly what I’ve thought, and I couldn’t hide my excitement.

“Really? Great! You... you promised!”

“Okay.”

I can see the relief on her face. I could never expect she would invite me, judging by her attitude. I doubt a girl would invite a boy she dislikes. She doesn’t dislike me, at very least... May I think this way? But what was that attitude this morning? Well, I’ve felt cool... Was it my imagination?

“K-Kashiwada-kun?” – I was silent, so she asked me; she doesn’t understand what I’m thinking.

“Ah, I’m sorry. I thought you were angry for something. I glad you weren’t.” – I didn’t actually want to say that to her, it has slipped out of my mouth.

“Did I something that makes you think this way?..”

“No, I’m sorry, it’s only my imagination, forget it.”

“E-mail...” – said Sakurai-san with so low voice it was barely heard.

“Eh?”

“I thought I made you angry somehow, when you didn’t reply back then...” – impatiently said Sakurai-san.

“But it seems it was my mistake, I’m sorry...”

“Eh?..”

She must be talking about the emails two weeks ago when we returned for the cosplay event. Next day I had been thinking a lot, and never replied

eventually. And it seems Sakurai-san thinks I hadn't replied because I was annoyed by something.

"I'm sorry, I thought you would be annoyed if I had sent you an email on the next day, after so much time passed."

"No way! How can I possibly be annoyed by your email? It's completely impossible!" – Sakurai-san clearly denied it, and I was very happy by that.

"Ah, I'm a... I like emails, that's all, nothing serious..."

"I see... Thank you. I'm sorry I didn't reply."

"No, I'm sorry too, for that misunderstanding... I'm always overreacting..."

Which means I was wrong thinking she dislikes me. At least, it was not my imagination that she became friendlier towards me since the cosplay event. On the other side, it may be that she has invited me just because she's excited by the Comiket. She is actually in high spirits all the day.

"Ah, let's go to Momo-chan. We have finished with shopping, she might be waiting for us."

"Yeah, sure."

We made for the room of circle where Koigasaki waits for us.

"By the way, I couldn't ask you at the event, but I remember you did a cosplay. Are you doing cosplay, usually?" – Sakurai-san asked me an unexpected question.

"No, of course. It was my first time."

I think that cosplay outfit was way too terrible in term of quality for somebody who used to do a cosplay.

"My friend invited me, and I came there by chance."

"Really? Your friend... is a girl?.."

"Eh? No, a boy. He is Suzuki, from A class. Do you know him?"

"A boy? Two boys doing a cosplay..." – Sakurai-san very surprised. And added that she doesn't know Suzuki. I honestly didn't expect her to not know such a popular guy. I thought he is very popular among our school year.

“Ha-ha... Two men doing cosplay is strange...” – I thought, she would be disgusted, but...

Her reaction overcame my expectations.

“N-no, not at all! It’s not strange! On the contrary, it’s beautiful! On the top of that, Phy Kickers, that popular among fujoshi anime! It’s brilliant! Are you... close to your friend?”

“Eh? Eh...” – Sakurai-san’s eyes suddenly began sparkling. And I think her breathing got faster...

“We are close, like, we are going to Akiba together...”

“I understood! Thank you for the good information!”

I thought I understood her a little, yet she is far beyond my comprehension. What made you so happy?

“By the way, why you speak normally in emails, but using keigo\* in real life?” – I remembered the problem, which had bothered me for all the day.

“Well, it’s strange, I guess, but I am used to this, and it would be difficult to restore the habit.”

“Oh, I see. Well, you can speak to me by any way you’re comfortable with.”

Then, we came to the circle, which we have visited the first at the Comiket. The queue is gone, and the sales assistant I saw earlier is talking with Koigasaki sitting on a chair beside her.

“Hello.” – I gave note that I’m here to that assistant girl. Yes, she was the girl who apologized to me when I was shocked this morning.

“Ah, Kashiwada, Azuki-chan.” – Koigasaki noticed us.

“She is the author of this circle, her pen name is Murasaki-san. When I left for the bathroom, there was crowded, and I felt bad because of the hot, so I left the queue and leaned against a wall. Then, it happened that Murasaki-san passed by me. She has remembered me, and she offered me to take a rest inside the circle room.”

“Really?”

I didn't even think that Koigasaki felt bad. Also, it seems that beautiful sales assistant is the actual writer... It's impressive that she remembers her customers.

"My assistant had left to buy a book, and the new issues were sold out, so I had my leisure. I glad Momo-san became my conversation partner.

The author... Murasaki-san, she said? Her smile has a sedative effect. She must be a good person.

"Momo-chan, are you alright? I'm sorry, I didn't notice..."

"Not at all! Murasaki-san gave me a cold drink... And I got better when I rested here. Further to say..."

Koigasaki took out something from her bag.

"Here!" – she took out a dojinshi book.

"I was given the new book!"

"Eh?" – I thought they were sold out in front of me.

"R-really?" They were not sold out?!

"I have looked deeper in the cart, and found there one sample issue." – said Murasaki-san with a smile.

"And furthermore!" – Koigasaki took out something from her bag again.

"I got the special sketch for female customers!"

It was the most important character of the circle, drawn in a lead pencil.

"I don't know does Suzuki-kun like this character, but I asked to draw the main character of this book."

"Oh, he does!"

"Really? Hooray!"

"Eh, well... Thank you for everything!" – she thanked Murasaki-san.

"No, not at all."

Murasaki-san turned to me and demonstrated her wide smile.

Koigasaki managed to buy the book Suzuki is longing for, plus she received a sketch from the author. Naturally, she shines with joy. I have been hopeless when the books were sold out, but who would think this is possible?..

“It was a pleasure to me to talk with Momo-san.”

Koigasaki and Murasaki-san look at each other and smiling. I thought, what great girls, to get this friendly after a little while...

“By the way, is the bathroom still crowded?” – Koigasaki suddenly asked.

“Of course.”

“I couldn’t pass there earlier, so I’d like to go there now... I’m feeling better owing to Murasaki-san. And it would be trouble if phones stop working again.”

“Oh, I want to go to a bathroom too.” – Sakurai-san followed Koigasaki. Yes, it’d be bothersome to lose connection while we are apart.

“Kashiwada-kun, why won’t you wait for them inside the room, then? You don’t know for sure is there a place to seat in the corridor due to the crowd, and the room is the well-known and easy-to-find place.”

“Eh? Are you sure?” – I glad she invited me, but I’m agitated a bit. And why does she know my name?..

“Thank you very much! Let’s go, Azuki-chan.”

“Please, don’t hurry.” – Murasaki-san watched as Koigasaki and Sakurai-san left to the toilet.

“Please, here.”

‘Thank you.’ – I entered the room and sat on the pipe chair where Koigasaki sat until recently. What’s happening? Why am I sitting beside the author of the Suzuki’s beloved dojinshi? I’m feeling strange. In addition, I’m seeing this woman for the first time. Furthermore, she is a beautiful woman older than me, and I have no idea what to say.

“Momo-san told me many stories while we have been waiting for you two.” – I was surprised by Murasaki-san’s voice.

“Eh, really?”

“Yes. Kashiwada-kun. Right? Momo-san told me that you’re teaching her various otaku things.”

“Eh? Well, yes. She has told you even about that?” – that’s why Murasaki-san knows my name.

“Yes. She told about the Only event of Love Minus, and about the cosplay event in the previous month. She told me many interesting stories.”

“I see...”

She told that to the person she first time met? Koigasaki must be immersed in conversation with Murasaki-san.

“It must be great to participate in events with other boys from a school. This is what the youth should be.”

“Eh?! I have nothing of that!”

Going to an otaku event with boys and girls... This is the youth, you say?

“Are you sure? My senior high school and university are women-only, so I’m dreaming about this. Didn’t you read manga about otaku circle in a university, where boys and girls are doing various interesting things? That is what I wanted in my heart.”

“Eh? It’s not that nice in reality.”

In a university as well... Which means, she’s a university student?

“I’m just being used by Koigasaki, I guess...”

“Is it really what you think? But aren’t you satisfied with that cute girl?”

“No-no-no, it’s not like I’m in love with Koigasaki or something.

“Oh, I’m surprised! How can you be nearside such a cute girl and don’t fall in love with her? Do you like the other one?”

The other one... She must be telling about Sakurai-san.

“No way. She hated me just recently, and I have no idea what she thinks about me now.”

What a strange development. Why am I talking about this with a person I just

met?

“Are you sure? At least, I think a girl would not come to an event with a boy she dislikes.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure of that...”

“I sure. You brought two cute girls to the Comiket. You have two flowers in both hands. All boys would envy you.”

At first, I thought Murasaki-san has a sedative smile, but now it’s... I’d say her smile it rather devilish. Also, I have a feeling she is just making fun of me. Well, it’s a pleasure when a beauty older than doing this.

I was aroused for some reason, and I felt thirsty. I took out my cold tea plastic bottle from my rucksack, but it was empty.

“Oh, it’s empty...”

“You can have mine if you don’t mind. I kept it cold.”

“Are you sure? Thank you.”

I felt very thirsty, so I didn’t think about what she said, and just started to drink what she has given me.

“By the way, I was drinking from the same bottle until recently.”

“~Buha!”

The truth she revealed made me erupt all that I have in my mouth.

“Wha..!?”

Isn’t it a direct kiss? With such beautiful woman? I’m impressed so much the bottle in my hand is shaking. What a creepy virgin I am...

“Oh, I’m sorry...”

It isn’t my fault, but I felt I should better apologize.

“He-he.” – Murasaki-san looks at me with her devilish smile. It does seem like she is making fun of me.

“We came back!” – Koigasaki and Sakurai-san returned from a toilet.

“Ah... Hello, girls! You’re quicker than I expected.”

“What a “hello, girls”? Stop that, please. The bathroom is not that crowded.”

I played a wrong character due to my excitement. Yet I noticed that Koigasaki has her usual makeup.

“T-thank you for this!” – I returned the bottle to Murasaki-san.

“You didn’t drink a bit... You don’t have to restrict yourself.”

“I’ll buy by myself later! I feel uneasy taking your precious water.”

“Are you sure?” – she asked again. I wasn’t really sure, considering her persistence.

After that, we thanked Murasaki-san for hospitality, she thanked us for buying the book, and we left the circle.

“Murasaki-san is a good person, she is so easy to talk to!” – Koigasaki is really restored. She looks like a different person than she was this morning.

Murasaki-san... Yes, she is a good person, but she is attractive before that. I would say I didn’t want to part with her. Hey, what I’m talking about?

“I hope didn’t say Murasaki-san something bad?”

“Of course!”

I have a feeling that I’m the victim here, but I guess I shouldn’t talk about it.

“She is a good person, and she is beautiful.” – said Sakurai-san to Koigasaki.

“Yes, she was beautiful”, – I agreed with Sakurai-san and remembered Murasaki-san.

“Eh? Kashiwada-kun, do you like this kind of woman?” – asked Sakurai-san gazing at me.

“What are you saying? It’s not like that...”

Honestly speaking, I like devilish women older than me... Also, Murasaki-san has a nice elegant breast, yet it’s not better than Sakurai-san’s.

“So have you already finished with shopping?” – asked Koigasaki Sakurai-san and me.

“Yes, I did everything!” – Sakurai-san is happy, she bought all books she

wanted to.

“By the way, I have to go to TFT on a cosplay event after this.”

“Eh?” – both me and Koigasaki surprised. She plans to go after we exhausted by the Comiket? She is surely an energetic girl. I thought it was strange why she don’t do a cosplay on the Comiket, so the answer is she will do it separately. She has a cart, and it’s too big even considering dojinshi she bought. Probably, cosplay suits are below there.

“Are you going alone?” – I asked.

“No, few of my cosplay friends will come with me there.”

“I see.”

And we parted our ways with Sakurai-san.

“I’m sorry I’m not seeing you off, Momo-chan. Take care of yourself, and don’t push yourself just because your condition improved recently. Take a good rest today.” – Sakurai-san is obviously sad by saying goodbye.

“Kashiwada-kun!”

“Eh?” – she suddenly called my name.

“Take care of Momo-chan. It would be best if you could see her to home.”

“Azuki-chan, that’s too much! I’m feeling great now! Have fun at that cosplay event!”

Sakurai-san shook Koigasaki’s hand and left.

“Sakurai-san is going to a cosplay event... She is so lively.”

“You sound like an old man.”

“So, what next? Are we going home?”

“Uh, let me think... I guess I’ll take a look on dojinshi. I couldn’t see that at all.”

“Eh?!” – I was shocked. I could never think that she would say it.

“Do you even understand what a dojinshi is?”

“Of course! I saw it at the Only event. I have struggled so much to come here!”

It's a waste if I won't see doujinshi! Besides, I've paid for the catalog."

"Well, you might be right..."

Koigasaki went to the closest circle and started watching their books. It seems she don't want to know what is in the books, she's just looking through them by picking anything trapped on her way.

"Ah, what cute arts." – she took a book with a cover, done in cute (for a girl) drawing manner and started looking it over. The next moment, she suddenly closed the book. The book she picked up has a label "for adults". Koigasaki went out from that room.

"The arts were so cute, but its contents... Are otaku think about that all the time?"

"Hey, you said just now that you're fully aware of what is a doujinshi."

"I anticipated, but that book... There was a girl... with many boys... It's unbelievable! How can somebody just come up with that?"

So she was "luckily" enough to pick up a book with a gang rape...

"Don't tell me you're buying such books too!"

"Doesn't it matter?"

Oh, this person is annoying. She said she wants to see books, and now she is displeased. Sakurai-san understood me, whatever erotic book I would pick up. What a huge difference.

"Okay, you got the idea. Let's go out of here."

"A... But I feel like... it's a waste to leave now... Are all books here this way?"

"No, just don't take books, which are marked for adults."

"Ah, I see... Say, it here a doujinshi about a manga I like?"

"Today is the second day, so it might be somewhere."

I took out the catalog from the rucksack and found there shojo\* manga pages.

"Here, for instance."

"Oh, I like this manga! But drawing manner is different."

“Of course, it’s drawn by another man.”

If everybody had complained that drawing manner is different, dojinshi would not exist.

“Oh! This one has a similar drawing, and it’s cute! I want to see this room!”

There was no “for adults” label on the circle’s stand, so I got Koigasaki inside.

“Wow!” – Koigasaki looked around with sparkles in her eyes, and started looking books here.

This time, she didn’t close the book immediately. She has read a while, and when she closed it...

“Can I have this one?”

“Eh?”

Unbelievable! Koigasaki bought doujinshi! I never thought such day might come...

“You bought a book...” – I spoke to Koigasaki when she finished.

“It has cute drawing and the story is exciting!~ I didn’t know there are such doujinshi.”

Her eyes shined with happiness.

After that, she walked around the rooms where her favorite genre is sold, but she bought only that book in the end. Apparently, nothing else has drawn her interest.

She bought a doujinshi she liked by her own will... I guess, she made a step towards becoming an otaku. After thirty minutes passed, Koigasaki completed walking around, and we decided to return.

“Oh, my Papa was calling.” – said Koigasaki looking at her phone.

“I’ll call him.”

“Okay.”

“Ah, hello, Papa! Ah, yeah, we have finished just now, and heading home. Eh? You don’t have to. I think it’s not crowded in trains by this time. Don’t worry!”

Okay, okay. Goodbye!"

Judging by what I heard, her father offered her to meet her and drive back by car.

"Your father offered you to return by car, right? Why don't you accept that? You have felt bad."

"It's okay, it's okay. He's so overprotective. And I'm feeling good now."

"But the way back is crowded too, and you'll have to line up for a train."

"Eh?! Really? On the way back too?!"

"Maybe you should ask your father, after all?"

"Yeah... But I'll have to wait for him more than one hour. I'd better get on a train."

"I see."

We left Big Sight and lined up in the queue to the station, – its end was near.

"By the way, you've spent a lot of time with Azuki-chan today, was it all right?"

"Eh?"

"You had complained that she hates you before."

"Ah..."

I had a talk with Koigasaki before the cosplay event.

"Well... Recently... Actually, after the day of the cosplay event, she isn't anymore, I guess."

"Eh? Really?"

"Yeah. We have talked so much today. Oh, she also invited me to a cinema!" – I said to Koigasaki to surprise her.

"Eh!? No way!" – Koigasaki did surprised!

"See? Did Sakurai-san told you something about me?"

"Eh? No, she didn't at all! Hey, you're close!" – Koigasaki made an annoyed

face and distanced her face from me.

“But I thought she wouldn’t invite a man she dislikes to a film? Or rather, she wouldn’t invite somebody she doesn’t care about, I guess. Maybe, she likes me for just a tiny bit?”

“Huh? She has only invited you to watch a film, don’t you imagine things! What kind of talk you have, to begin with? What did she say to you then?”

“Oh, it was revealed that both of us like the same anime, and this autumn a film based on this anime is going to be screened, but she has nobody to go together, so she invited me.”

“It must be nothing more than this. She just has nobody to go with.” – said Koigasaki with relaxed voice.

“But still, she wouldn’t go together with a person she hates, right?”

“Well, yes. She doesn’t hate you, apparently. But there is no special meaning in that, so please stop imagining anything apart from that, okay?” – Koigasaki has cut short. I hoped to see a good reaction...

“By the way, can you show me the sketch once more time? I had no time to see it.”

“Okay, I guess...” – she immediately took out the sketch and handed over to me with a satisfied face.

“Wow, great! Suzuki will be happy for sure.”

“You bet! Isn’t it artful? I can’t wait to give it to him! Ah, do you want to see the dojinshi? I can let you see for a while.” – Koigasaki suggested before I asked for, and handed over the dojinshi to me. She seems to be very happy. I started looking inside the book.

“Wow, this is... great...” – I said. No, it has artful and cute arts. But this time I thought “great” about another thing.

“Isn’t it a great erotica?” – I asked Koigasaki and looked at her, expecting her to assent.

Yes, this doujinshi is skillful and cute, and contains very bold erotica. It’s labeled for adults, of course. That’s good they didn’t confirm your age,

Koigasaki.

“Hey, you! Would you stop getting turned on from my doujinshi? Oh, I meant Suzuki-kun’s... Don’t do it outside, you pervert!” – Koigasaki blushed and took the dojinshi out from my hands.

“I’m not turned on! ... Hey, did you saw it?”

“I did... a little...”

Yet, she didn’t shout about indecency and things... she has grown up. Maybe.

“S-Suzuki-kun is a healthy boy, so it’s fine... I understand he reads this! So I’m not shocked at all... If it’s Suzuki-kun, I’ll allow him everything...”

And she insulted me saying I’m turned on and calling me a pervert? Why she acts with me this way?

“By the way, this book was drawn by that Murasaki-san, right?”

Just imagining how that tidy and perfect woman draws such a filthy book makes me aroused. I remembered that you should not judge people by their appearance.

“Murasaki-san is a very good person! We were talking all the time while you were shopping for your pervy books! She remembered me when I was shocked by the book was sold out, and she spoke to me! Then she returned a cart to search for leftovers, she is a wonderful person! She draws skilfully, she’s a beautiful, and well-dressed! She talks and behaves like a lady, and she has a high level of woman power!

Huh, so they use “high woman power” towards this kind of woman...

“But you were talking for a long time. How could you talk so long, if you’re not an otaku? Did you understand each other?”

“I had said in the beginning that I’m not an otaku, but I want to become one, and that I came to buy a book instead of my friend who is a fan of the circle, and it was all right. She told me that I must like that friend.”

“Ah...”

By the way, Murasaki-san mentioned that Momo-san told her many stories.

“Then I asked her, why she does it, despite she is pretty and doesn’t seem like an otaku.”

“Once more a question out of blue.”

“She answered that at first she had been only reading and watching side, and drew for fun, and she was too embarrassed to show that somebody else, but one day she uploaded her works into the net, and she was happy by the reviews her works received, so she decided to get rid of shame and publish thing she likes!”

She likes... I guess, that’s about the doujinshi. She likes erotica... Wah, how indecent.

“After that, I asked her how to become an otaku.”

“I believe this one is hard to answer.”

“She said, when I found a work that would arouse my interest, I’ll become an otaku regardless of my will, so I should seek after it, and then immerse into it.”

“Well, that’s right.”

Since she first declared she wants to become an otaku, I keep telling her that becoming an otaku is not something that depends on your will.

“In the end, she told me that she would love to meet me at another event, and we exchanged emails and she added me as a friend in mixi!”

“Wow, really?”

Her communication skills are awesome. I understood it since she met Sakurai-san. Yet, it’s limited to females.

“I’m free now, so I guess I’ll send her a friend request... Search, search...”

Koigasaki opened mixi on her phone.

Mixi, you say... I have registered in mixi when I was in my junior high; my friend invited me there. At first, I’ve posted reviews, journal records, and the like, but I got bored and I haven’t updated my feed recently. Currently, I’m logging there two or three times a week merely to read some news and other’s posts.

“Request was sent. By the way, do you have mixi?”

“I have it, but I rarely log in there. It’s uncomfortable to just watch friend’s posts and don’t comment them, and it bothers to comment that. They could see my traces.”

“Eh? Traces? What era is that? Traces are not existed since long ago.”

“Really?!”

I didn’t check its functionality, so I didn’t know.

“Well, I’m not using it, and there are only Kiritani and Suzuki from the senior high left.”

Those two are not using it actively too, though.

“Suzuki-kun?! Are you on his friends list? Wait, he uses mixi?!”

“Well, yeah.”

“What is Suzuki-kun’s name in mixi? I’ll search for him!”

“I don’t really remember, he rarely posts in mixi... He has some stupid nickname.”

“Why would you forget that? Okay, I’ll search from your friend list. What is your name there?”

I had no choice but tell Koigasaki my nickname. She quickly found my little friend list, and opened it full screen. There were about twelve names.

“Which one is Suzuki-kun?”

“Eh... This one: [So-tan @ Kugimiya-ism]”

“Kugimiya? What is that? Strange name.”

“You see, Kugimiya... There is a voice actress, Kugimiya Rie, and “affected by Kugimiya Rie” is how her passionate fans are called.”

“Oh... He calls himself So-tan... How cute~!”

Her consciousness moved to another place, which saves me from the explanation about Kugimiya-ism.

“But there are very few posts... Could it be he restricted them only to

friends?"

"No, he simply didn't write a lot."

"I see. That's sad... Okay, I put him in my favorites!"

As expected, she hasn't enough of courage to send a friend request. It's true, if you can't meet your beloved, it's a relief to see that person's posts in mixi or somewhere else. Hasegawa's mixi... Oh, there is no way she has it.

"Oh, I sent a request to you."

"Eh?! Ah, okay."

Oh, I see. If you notice a mutual friend, it's natural to send a request to him.

"I wonder, is Azuki-chan in mixi? I'll ask her next time."

After that, we had a trivial talk, played on phones, and after some time, we could get into the Yurikamome station. Sakurai-san has told me to see Koigasaki off, so I offered it, but she refused "I'm feeling better now, so don't see me", and she seemed fine, so we parted on some station.

\*

The evening of the same day, after I took a bath and dragged out my exhausted body, I found an email from Sakurai-san.

[Thank you for today! I was happy to talk with you. I'm sorry for running wild during the shopping...]

Sakurai-san has even sent me an email for such thing... I felt excited for a moment, but then I remembered Koigasaki's words.

"There is no special meaning in that, so please stop imagining anything apart from that." Yes, Koigasaki may be right, and Sakurai-san is sending me emails just because she is a kind and serious girl. Also, she must be in high spirits since the Comiket. Probably, you would be excited when somebody suddenly changes his attitude from hate to kindness, however, there is nothing special from that person's point of view. I guess, Koigasaki would send such email as well.

"Hm?"

I noticed that the email is not ended.

[P.S. I can't wait for the film!]

And a smile deco-emoji in the end. My lips are smiling, but I'm trying to overcome it. Don't go overboard, Kashiwada Naoki. It must nothing more than ordinary civility. I calmed down and wrote an answer with a critical eye.

# Chapter 5

“Oh... Tomorrow I have a pool supplementary... What a pain.” – murmured while playing games with Akari at home.

“A pool? Why would you have that?”

“I caught a cold in the first semester and I didn’t come to a pool lesson. And I have no clue why they do that during summer vacations.” – I explained to Akari.

“You’re lucky... I didn’t go to a pool beside the school’s one. I want to go to a pool!”

“But going there would only make you tired. Isn’t it bothersome?”

“No, pools are very fun! I want to a pool! A pool!”

“Why won’t you go with your friends, then?”

That moment, Akari has hit my game character despite she’s my ally.

“Hey, what are you doing?” – I looked at her. She was glaring at me. Hey, did I say something wrong?

“I’ve got tired playing this game. Mama, let’s go to the bath!” – Akari left the controller and dropped the game.

“You’re so arbitrary!”

She ignored what I said, took a bath towel and pajama, and went to the bath. Recently, there were many situations where I can’t get a grasp of why Akari is angry. Like this one, I don’t get at all why she is offended, despite she might be offended during her rebellious age.

“Akari, you still cannot detach yourself from your brother...” – said my mother with a strange smile on her face. What was that? Isn’t a brother and a sister playing games a usual thing?

“Mama, hurry!” – called Akari from the bathroom.

“I’m coming!” – the mother went down to the first floor with a bath towel. A junior high student takes a bath with her mother... When would she stop that?

I'm worried as a brother. She is too childish for a junior high student. She lacks not detaching from her brother, but detaching from her mother.

\*

The next day, I prepared for the pool, which starts at ten o'clock and went to the school. It's a lesson, but a teacher is not teaching something. It's just you have to swim 25 meters ten times for each time you skipped a pool lesson. In my case, I skipped one lesson, so I can swim ten times and swim as much as I want or go home. I don't love swimming, so I plan to go home. My classmate friend Kiritani has never skipped the pool, so he won't come. Which means there won't be anybody to talk with.

The only pleasure I might have is this pool lesson unlike usual will be with girls, and I will be able to delight in girls' swimsuits. I would be good fortune if Hasegawa would be there, but I think she won't come. She is a serious girl, and she wouldn't skip a lesson due to a trivial cold.

"Hi there, Kasshi!" – I heard the unexpected voice when I came to the pool's changing room.

"Eh, Suzuki? Why somebody from the class A has come?"

If I remember correctly, different classes had different time for pool lessons...

"Too few people were to come, so classed were merged into one lesson."

"Seriously? I didn't know!"

Well, that's great I have somebody to talk with.

"You had skipped the pool too?"

"Yeah, I have caught a cold once. Strange that here are so few of boys." – looked around the room, and there was a way too small amount of people considering they are from all classes, from A to D. Well, it's better than noisy crowd anyways.

We changed into swimsuits, took a shower, and went to the pool. I cast a glance on Suzuki in his swimsuit. Despite he doesn't do any exercises, he has a cut body. Why is he so perfect?

"Oh..." – it's way more of girls here than I expected.

“Girls surely are in majority.”

I’m feeling excited.

“Maybe they had skipped due periods?”

“Reasonable. By the way, you said it just like that?..”

He has an older sister, so he understands it quicker. I then felt girl’s gaze on me. I thought I said something wrong at first, but in a moment, I understood that it was my paranoia.

“Suzuki-kun came...”

Girls are looking at Suzuki, not at me. He is popular even here... And my role is a background to make him look better.

After that, we gathered in one place and a teacher started a warm-up. My eyes are attracted by girls’ swimsuits. I wonder, why they wear the same prescribed by the school navy-blue plain swimsuits, and those swimsuits are so attractive nonetheless? I searched for Hasegawa, but unfortunately, she hadn’t come, as I expected. However, I found some other girl with a good body. Who is she?.. I lifted my eyes upper to her face...

S-Sakurai-san! She wears the same swimsuit, but her body is good enough to stand out among other girls. Her big breast is swinging along the exercise’s moves... Oh crap, that’s magnificent! Well, it’s not like the bigger breast the better. Indeed, Hasegawa’s breast is not big by any means, but she is the one I wanted to see.

Thinking about that, my eyes met with the Sakurai-san’s.

“...!”

I felt awkward and averted my eyes on a girl beside her...

Oh, isn’t that Koigasaki.

Her body is childish, as I imagined to myself. She noticed me and looked with a severe face, and then she has said something to Sakurai-san. (I can’t hear them, of course, they are too far.) I can guess, though, something like “Ew, Kashiwada is looking here, it gives me creeps” or something worse. I have no intent looking at you, Koigasaki.

But the next moment, she began to act in a strange manner. Her eyes wandering so fast I can figure it from here, and her moves are abnormal.

Ah, I see.

“Hm? Kasshi, are you okay?” – Suzuki looked at my exercises with a strange look.

Koigasaki noticed him for sure.

“Okay, everybody knows how much you have to swim, so go ahead.” – the teacher told us to start. On the other side of the pool, Sakurai-san and Koigasaki changed position as if they don’t want I see them.

“Kasshi, how many times you swim?”

“I skipped once when I had a cold, so I guess it’s ten.”

“The same here. We can play after swimming, so let’s start.”

“Yeah.”

He intends to play with a boy in the pool?.. What? Well, it’s summer now, and I never visited pools other than the school’s one, so I guess it’s fine.

For some time we just swam. The teacher scolds if you are resting, so our process was like this: swim 25 meters; change your status near the pool; line up; swim another 25 meters. I have to repeat that while I’m not tired. The line progresses quick, so there is not much of spare time to talk.

When I finished with required swimming, I decided to take a rest near the pool and found familiar figure sitting there and clasping her knees.

“Oh, Sakura-san... Tired?” – after a delay, I thought that it’s bad to ignore her, so I spoke to her.

“Kya... Kyashiwada-kun?!” – she screamed and shocked me.

“What is that kya?”

“Oh, I’m sorry. But... We meet in such suits...”

“Well, we’re at the pool, so it’s natural.”

Sakurai-san is overreacted. I’m deciding to stop looking at her, by my eyes are

not listening to me. Her big breast is covered by the school uniform usually, (you can still estimate its size, though), and now all dividing it from the outer world is a thin cloth. Sakurai-san feels ashamed and tries to hide her breast with hands and legs, but that's not completely possible.

It's great that we have a pool lesson today. Thank you influenza!

"Uh..." – I noticed, that Sakurai-san's face is red, and she averts her eyes from me.

"I'm sorry! I'm not staring at you!"

It's a lie, though. But I didn't expect her to be ashamed this much.

"Why would they do a joint lesson with guys?" – Sakurai-san was displeased.

"Eh, but... When you're doing a cosplay, you have a chance to show much more of your skin."

I remembered what Sakurai-san had worn at that event. The lower part of her body now is more opened, however the upper part of a vocaloid is obviously far more exposed. Her breast was wilder than now, I remember her breast was flawlessly visible. Regardless of that, she was calm doing a cosplay, and she was happy to pose.

"A cosplay and a swimsuit are totally different! I'm playing a character wearing a cosplay suit, and I don't feel it's me, so there's nothing to shame. A swimsuit... it's totally me!"

I think Sakurai-san is Sakurai-san even wearing a cosplay, though.

"Is it really so?..."

"Oh... Kashiwada, do you remember our promise?"

"Eh?" – I got anxious when she suddenly changed the topic.

"What? The movie!"

"Ah, of course!"

She meant promise to go to the film... I was keep telling myself that it has no deep meaning, those Koigasaki's words.

"It's one month just before that day!"

“Eh, really?”

“Really!” – Sakurai-san was displeased a bit. Is it means that she actually anticipates it? Or it’s just my imagination again? I thought she only was in high spirits on the Comiket... Was I wrong?..

“Oh, I’m tired...” – heard Koigasaki’s voice behind and turned to her.

“By the way, Kashiwada, why are you sitting near to Azuki-chan and blushing?”

“W...wha?!”

“And your eyes are sparkling. Disgusting. Don’t get closer to Azuki-chan anymore!”

Koigasaki stood between me and Koigasaki-san, touched her shoulder like protecting her from me, and scowls at me as if I’m a slime. Why is she suddenly got so angry?

“It’s not like.”

Well, Koigasaki has a childish figure, even if you look closer. However, she has a light skin, and her figure is well-proportioned overall, I guess there are guys who like it, but as for breast-lover like me, I’d prefer Koigasaki-san’s...

“Ah, Kasshi! Have you finished swimming already?”

Once more time, I heard somebody’s voice and three of us turned to him.

Suzuki... why would you ignore two cute girls and speak to me? Your ignore skills are horrible... The maximal level, I guess.

“Su...!” – I heard low Koigasaki’s voice. She blushed and trembling. And... she is hiding her chest by her arms.

“I was swimming breaststroke, so I have the last swim left.” – Suzuki is ignoring girls.

“Huh? Why did you swim breaststroke?”

“I’m more skilled in it. Okay, then.”

“Ah, good luck...” – said Suzuki and returned to the start.

“Kashiwada-kun, it was your friend?” – Sakurai-san asked once Suzuki left. Sakurai-san, not Koigasaki!

“Ah, yeah. His name is Suzuki.”

“Suzuki?! I remember! You came to the cosplay event together, right?”

“Yes, correct.”

In that moment, Sakurai-san’s eyes began to sparkle. She must be fallen in love with that handsome guy, I thought for a second.

“What a good match... oh, no, I meant friend.” – said excited Sakurai-san. I think it’s not what you call falling in love.

“Ah, I’m too excited... oh, no, my... my eyes hurt, I’ll go to wash them!”

Excited Sakurai-san ran away to the corner of the pool. What exactly she is excited with? I don’t really get what she’s thinking about. I was left. Koigasaki was left too, near me.

She embraces herself and looks in nowhere.

“Suzuki-kun... saw me in a swimsuit... That’s awful...”

“Awful? What are talking about?”

“That’s awful! I couldn’t imagine that he would come today! If I had known that, I would put a water-resistant makeup, and lose weight on a diet... And I would insert pads in the swimsuit to make my breast look bigger!”

“Pads?..”

So she is aware that she has no breast. Also, is there any sense losing the weight any more?

“I can’t believe it... Also, I could give him the book I bought recently... I should have brought it!”

“That’s a point.”

She tells about the doujinshi book she bought on the Summer Comiket.

“It’s too long to wait for the second semester. I really should give it today... Why didn’t you tell me that Suzuki-kun will come?”

“I didn’t know before today.”

Koigasaki made a deep sigh.

“Ah, sure... Also, I have to say you something.”

“Eh?”

Koigasaki suddenly changed the topic.

“The next Saturday, 27<sup>th</sup>, there will be the fireworks at Sumida River, you know?”

“I see.”

I see. How can I know something that only the reals know? It’s one of the most popular events. Someone like me would not understand what you trying to say by this.

“We decided our class to go together and invite anybody who we’d like to.”

“Hah.”

“Are you in?”

“Eh?!” – I was surprised she turned it on me.

“Didn’t you hear what I’m saying? We can invite anybody.”

“Really? Who is going?”

“Miki who has suggested this, Mizuki, and others... About five girls and five boys, I think. I don’t know who would come from boys. They’ll invite from now on, so I guess there would be more of us.”

“Huh.”

A group of nice guys... Probably, if the group grow bigger, there may be guys I could speak with. If Kiritani would agree to come, I’d take part too... Ah, but if I’ll come they would think like “who the hell invited this?..”.

“Don’t “huh” me! Isn’t it a chance for you?”

“Eh?”

“Invite Hasegawa-san.”

“Eh?!”

I didn't think about that.

“It's a perfect chance. It's too risky to invite her alone yet, but this is fine, I guess. Won't you be happy if Hasegawa-san comes to the Fireworks festival?”

“True. You're right. It would look natural if I invite her.”

Classmates are one thing, but Hasegawa! I definitely would be happy if she'd go! She doesn't recognize as even a friend, but this is a chance to get closer to her. Also, she wants to get closer with our classmates, I understood it on the Odaiba. Then, if she managed to befriend with the classmates at the Fireworks if I could help her by this way... There is no more joy for me to be helpful for the girl I like.

If I'd manage to get intimate with Hasegawa, I'll do two things together.

“Okay, I'll send her an email!”

“Try to not send her something strange.”

I didn't even hope to see Hasegawa once more time during the summer vacation.

“But... aren't you too cooperative? You told me this especially for I could invite her...”

Honestly, I'm surprised she helps me so much.

“I've always been this way! Well, you had helped me a lot on the Comiket.”

Oh, so she has a strong sense of duty. Sasagawa and her friends suggested going to the Fireworks, and Koigasaki invited me. I'm grateful to both parties.

After that, Koigasaki and Sakurai-san went to women changing room, Suzuki finally finished swimming and came to me, so we played as I promised (??), and then we returned to the changing room too.

I was anticipating the Fireworks Festival. I hoped to take a revenge from that Odaiba date.

Festivals... women should wear yukatas, and men are fine with casuals? Or I should wear jinbei\*? Moreover, will Hasegawa wear a yukata?! It will suit her

for sure! Just imagine her in yukata is enough to understand that a yukata exist for Hasegawa.

Well, relax, me. Don't rush things. You should first know whether Hasegawa comes to the Fireworks Festival. I have to write her a decent email before thinking about clothes, because the email contents may affect her decision.

I was on the highest tense due to anticipating of the biggest event of this summer.

# Chapter 6

[Hello, Kashiwada speaking. This summer is hot, isn't it? How is your summer vacation? (smile) By the way, did you know there is the Fireworks Festival on 27<sup>th</sup>, it's on the next Saturday? The classmates plan to visit it, would you like to go with us?]

That evening, I spent about thirty minutes typing and deleting until the email was completed, then I gathered my courage and pressed "send". Hasegawa didn't answer that day so I was depressed thinking she ignored it, but in the second half of the next day, the answer came.

[Good day. Currently, I'm visiting the grandmother's house. Thank you for the invitation to the Fireworks Festival. I am free at that day, but is it fine for me to come?]

The reply has come, and I'm happy again. I started to type her the reply.

[Thank you for the answer. So you are at your grandma's home. I believe everybody would happy if you come to the Fireworks Festival.]

Everybody... I mean me, of course, but I can't that to her. After ten minutes, my phone rang.

[Okay, I'll accept your invitation. Where and at what time is the meeting?]

I made a happy pose and told her the place and the time heard from Koigasaki. She replied [Understood.], and I sent her [Okay, looking forward to the meeting], and then she didn't reply. Huh, what a deja vu... I wasn't needed anymore, so I emailed to Koigasaki [Hasegawa said she will come to the Fireworks Festival!]. Two minutes later, I received [Grat-s.]

[What I should wear there? Do men wear yukata or something? I have no one, though (laugh)]

[If it was a date, you could wear yukata or jinbei, but you'd stand out at the class party. Also, plain guys like you look disgusting in such clothes] – wrote Koigasaki. I'm not sure should I feel relief or sadness.

Then, I send an invitation email to my classmate Kiritani. He's a baseball club

member, he said that our team is weak and unmotivated, so they probably won't have training during the summer vacation. So I hoped he would come to the festival, however his reply surprised me.

[Hi Kashiwada, long time! Sorry, I'm going there with my girlfriend. Will you go there? We may meet there.(smile)]

I was about to drop my phone, so much I was surprised. Die, the reals! Oh, it's not a time for this. I presumed Kiritani would come, but if he won't, who I'll speak with? Koigasaki said I can invite whoever I want, but Kiritani refused, and except him... Yes, I have nobody else to invite. I hate myself for lack of friends.

Well, I guess it will be all right. Koigasaki will come, and she said there might be more members, so somebody who I can talk with might appear. I hope my communication skills rose, and I could find a new friend. I told to myself...

\*

The Fireworks Festival day.

The fireworks start at 6:15, but we agreed to meet at 5:30. However, some of the main members hold a place from the afternoon. After all, the festival is very popular and crowded, so you have to hold a place beforehand.

If I would late to the meeting, I'll have to search them alone later, so late is unacceptable. I left home estimating to arrive there ten minutes earlier.

I made a transfer to the train heading to the station of destination. The closer my train to that station, the more people inside. I was surprised to understand that crowd is as dense as during morning rush hour, or even denser, like it was on the day of the Summer Comiket.

The last time I was at the Fireworks Festival is when I came along with my family in grade school, so I didn't expect it's so crowded. At last, the doors opened, most of the passengers left the carriage and following the stream I passed through wickets.

I have planned to arrive ten minutes earlier, however, due to the crowd I came just in time. Where are guys from my class? I'm looking around. Near the wickets, I noticed a group of young people. Koigasaki and Hasegawa are among them, so I ran to them.

“Ah, Kashiwada.” – I was noticed not by Koigasaki or Hasegawa, but Sasagawa.

“I’m sorry to have you wait.”

I’m sure that nobody waits for me, though.

Most of the girls wear yukatas, and all of the boys in casual clothes. Whoah, I glad I didn’t wear yukata. However, unfortunately, Hasegawa was wearing not yukata, but the white short-sleeved blouse and bluish knee-length skirt. I haven’t seen her around three weeks, so I happy to see her anyway. Koigasaki beside her wears a pink yukata with flowers and red belt. She upswept her hair and pinned with a big flower. She is well-dressed as always, but the yukata suit her best. I had heard that yukata suits with a childish figure, and it’s apparently true.

“Everybody came?”

“Abe should have come, maybe.”

Guys from our class are acting cool towards me, and they counting whether all is here or not. I took a closer look at the people gathered here. Boys and girls are fifty-fifty, and all of them belong to the core group of our class. The only people I talked with are Koigasaki and Hasegawa. I remember their names and faces, but they might not remember me. It seems here is mostly soccer club, cheerleading club, and girls tennis club, in other words, the reals of the reals, who are on the top of the hierarchy.

What I’m doing here?.. Why have I come? Or something like this they must be thinking now. And I think this way too!

I cast a glance on Hasegawa. Surprisingly, she’s friendly speaking with Koigasaki. I guess, they had come closer to the study meeting. I have nobody to talk with apart from them, and I want to attach to them. I would do so if they were alone, but they are surrounded by other girls, so I can’t approach there at all.

When all who has to come arrived and we made for the Kawara. I’m alone silent among them, as I have nobody to talk with.

I want to go home now, but if do that, what was a point going here? Ah, by

the way, I didn't see the guys who have been holding a place. Maybe, there is somebody not from the group. And I will be able to speak with them, I hope. That's my last hope.

"Ah, come here!"

At the Kawara I found few classmates on the blue sheeting waving hands to us. I got upset seeing them. Koigasaki's friend Amemiya Mizuki, her gyaru-friend, and few flashy boys. Nobody I could befriend with. Rather, the sort I dislike. There are few cans bear them, and that was a bear. They have been drinking a beer since afternoon?.. The senior high school students? It seems they are holding the place for a long time already.

"Okay, take your seats." – everybody started to take off shoes and going on the sheeting.

Okay. I must find a place to sit. I would like to sit near Hasegawa, but...

"Oh, can I sit near Hasegawa-san?"

What a tragedy. Some flashy classmate quickly sat near Hasegawa. Another girl sits from the other side of Hasegawa, so I can't go there. I have to give up now. I looked on Koigasaki, – she is surrounded by Sasagawa, Amemiya, and some gyarus. I can't sit near Koigasaki too. I can't push them away, of course, so I sat where I was. Some flashy boys are around me, so naturally I have nobody to talk.

I will have to watch the fireworks till the end... They are not started yet, but I'm already depressed. There are bear and juice along with sweeties, so we can take whatever we want. We chipped in a 1,000 yen, so they must have bought those.

I can't drink a beer, so I took a random can with juice.

"Hey, you two, you're flirting too much! The fireworks are not yet started." – said Hasegawa louder than usual. Who is she speaking to?

"We don't flirt at all~." – Koigasaki's friend Amemiya Mizuki and my classmate Takagi are holding hands and rested against his shoulder.

"And why are you already drunk?"

“Eh? We didn’t drink at all~.”

Well, Amemiya, I can see three empty beer cans beside you. Amemiya Mizuki... the type of gyaru I dislike the most.

I clearly remember how she said me to get off from Koigasaki because I’m causing problems to her. Sasagawa warned me too, yet she misunderstood things, and she apologized later. But Amemiya Mizuki spread the rumor that I’m bothering Koigasaki, and bothering them consistently. It’s not like I want it, just a matter of fact, she didn’t apologize. I do not dislike Sasagawa anymore, but I can’t help but have negative emotions towards Amemiya. I wonder, why Koigasaki is friends with this girl?

Also, I found another strange thing. Amemiya had been in love with Suzuki. It was at the karaoke, at least. So why she’s flirting with another man right now? We would call a bitch the girl who flirts with a boy despite she loves another man.

“Eh? Mizuki, are you dating with Takagi?” – it was Koigasaki who has the same question.

“Ah, Momo, didn’t I tell you?”

“I didn’t know...” – Koigasaki couldn’t hide her surprising.

Well, if they are dating, it’s natural to flirt with each other. I still can’t accept that they doing it in public, but that’s nothing in comparison with flirting with a boy while you have a boyfriend. Which means, Amemiya is not in love with Suzuki anymore, isn’t good for you, Koigasaki? That’s not my business, though.

I looked at Amemiya and Takagi once again. I would say it’s rather Amemiya is leaning to Takagi, she is head over heels in love. The only thing bothers me is that Takagi is not a handsome or flashy boy. I never could tell this about him in school, and I can’t say it now looking at him.

He is a baseball club member, so he has a jacked body and he is tall, above 180 centimeters. His hairstyle and eyebrows are in fit, but eyebrows are too narrow. He dressed well, this style is called B-boy, I guess. Like, I’ve born in Tokyo, and I have many bad boys-friends. He is one of the central figures in the class, I think he is something like a leader. I found him scary a bit, but he’s nice

to girls. He says something interesting, and all classmates would smile. Of course, I never talk with him. However, he is not a handsome boy by any means. I guess... If you would rank only a face, I can say mine is better. (I can't say in somebody for all the world). And Amemiya I loves him.

Amemiya has a bad temper, but she has a cute appearance. (It's mostly the effect of hairstyle and makeup, I think). Such a cute girl loves a boy who is not a handsome person. Why is such irrational thing happens? I can't comprehend it.

"Mizuki, we're beer is out. Buy some, please."

"Eh? But the fireworks going to start soon. Well, okay..."

I saw something that stroke me. Takagi made his girlfriend, Amemiya, to run an errand. I thought a man must go in such cases... But Amemiya resisted slightly and went. To make an errand for the own girlfriend... What on the earth he's thinking about? He was so kind to her until this... Why he made an errand to a girl if there are plenty of boys nearby? Even me, I'm easy to be used. Moreover, I feel out of place and want to run away from here. How can Amemiya endure this attitude? Why she fell for him, to begin with? I'm working so hard for girls, and I have no return at all. What is with this one-sidedness? I just don't understand girls.

The fireworks started as soon as Amemiya invited some of other girls and went for a beer. I dislike Amemiya, but now, just for a little, I'm feeling pity for her.

The fireworks that I'm able to see since the long ago are beautiful. They managed to get a good place, so I can see fireworks from this close. Now I understand why so many people gathered to firework festivals – it's a rare chance to see this sight for free.

The classmates are delighted with it, and they taking pictures on their phones and cameras, someone even recording a video.

Hasegawa is speaking about something with Koigasaki watching the fireworks. I want to go to them... As for me, I have nobody to tell my feelings, so I did it in my mind. The classmates were immersed with the fireworks just for a while, then they returned to beer and talking. Amemiya and Takagi are flirting: she sits on him, and then she lay her head on his legs. Most of the classmates changed

their positions, and the picture changed a lot.

Maybe, it's my chance to go to Hasegawa, using this fuss? I looked at her... Hasegawa is speaking with another boy. I was surprised to see her speaking not with Koigasaki, and moreover – with a male.

"I was surprised that you would come to such meeting."

"Really?..."

"Yeah, very surprised! I thought you don't like crowds."

"Really? It's not like that..."

"Hasegawa-san, you're really great. The best of our year by academic results, and good in sports!"

"Thank you..."

Well... I invited Hasegawa here, but I could talk to her today never once. Yet, other boys speaking with her all the time. I was right thinking that many men want to talk with her, but she is just hard to approach. She doesn't understand enough what she should tell, but you can speak to her if you would lead the conversation. She also has no phobia like Koigasaki.

Hasegawa said she wants to make friends among the classmates, and that she will give her best. Therefore, this is a good matter as for Hasegawa. I should have been happy for this, actually... But for some reason, I can't cheer for her sincerely. It's true for when she is speaking with girls, but I'm starting being jealous when she's speaking with boys. It was only my intent to speak with Hasegawa today, while her motive was to make friends.

In fact, I'm feeling unwell seeing how she is speaking with the classmates. It seems, deep in my heart, I don't want to help her. What an egoistic human I am, desiring Hasegawa to befriend with only me. Unlike me who is always alone, Hasegawa is a popular girl. Most of the guys want to speak with her. I even have no time to approach to her.

That moment, I cast a glance at Koigasaki. Probably, I have sought for help. She was happy talking with Sasagawa, Amemiya, and other girls.

Oh, I see now.

I'm the only loner here.

Nobody needs me now.

Nothing has changed since the karaoke party in the first semester.

I was in high spirits and took part the event, but I couldn't talk to anybody, in the end, I become aware of own worthless and how miserable I am, and depressed.

How many more times I have to go through this scene to understand it?

Nobody would notice my absence if I leave now, I thought, and become gloomy. Being unable to endure this, I took my bag and left. Nobody called me. Nobody saw me. I walked towards the station in despair, but I felt I must take a leak and made my way to a toilet.

Due to the fireworks festival, there is a long line for the public toilets at Kawara. Women toilets are numerous, so there is no queue to them, but men toilets are few, and the queue is huge. I saw some men standing in the woods, and now I understand them. I didn't feel I would do the same, so I lined up.

Then, I was surprised by the melody of my phone. It's Koigasaki calling. I was astonished, but I took it up.

"Kashiwada? You're gone along with your bag, didn't you leave by any chance?"

"Eh?"

What a pitiful I am. I was impressed by Koigasaki's call. I was sure nobody would notice me, and in mere chance somebody did, he won't do anything. But she actually called me...

"We have just started, why did you leave?!"

"Well, there is no difference where I am or not there, Hasegawa is far so I can't speak to her, and I'm tired now."

There is no point to lie, so I told all I thought.

"Huh?! What a weakling you are! Are you sure you fine with this?"

"There is nothing I can do anyway."

“You were preparing for this day, you waited for this day, didn’t you? If she’s far, you can move closer! We all are moving, you know?”

“But she’s lively speaking with other guys, and...”

“You didn’t change at all since then! You had a date with her, you got closer to her, and she even started to consider you as a good person! Are you okay another man will take her?”

I didn’t change... Yes, Koigasaki is right. If I go home now, I’m the same as I was at the karaoke. “Run if you feel uncomfortable” was my motto. And nothing have changed.

“Not okay, but...”

“Don’t you want to change to the reals anymore?”

I didn’t know that the path to the reals is so stony and harsh.

“The boy beside Hasegawa-san will take her! If you’re fine with that, go home and give up on her! Decide.”

Give up on Hasegawa?.. Can I possibly do that?

“Why did you suddenly talk about that?”

“Am I wrong? If not, come back now!”

I can’t possibly give up on her. Nothing has started yet, in the first place.

“Oh, I got it, I’m coming. I have to visit a toilet first.”

“Do it faster, before Hasegawa-san is taken off.”

“By the way, where are you calling from?”

What if she’s sitting at the same place and talking with me?..

“I’ve moved away from others to call you. What about that?”

Did she move away especially to make a call to me? I’m reassured, and at the same time, I’m grateful to Koigasaki.

“Okay, come back already.” – said Koigasaki and hung up.

Honestly speaking, I still feel uncomfortable returning to that place.

But there is one person, who waits for me. Who supports for me. This was enough to save me mostly.

Once I returned, I'll have to move closer to Hasegawa. If somebody would be speaking with her, I'll have to join their conversation. But... can I do that?.. If not, I'll have to wait until he left for a toilet and withdraw from his seat. I'll have to. At least, that's better than just watching her speaking with somebody else. I couldn't wait for the queue any longer and returned without having the matter done. It wasn't an urgent matter in the first place, so I can wait by now.

I cheered up myself and headed to the sheeting where everybody sits, when...  
“Kashiwada-kun?..”

I was surprised when somebody called my name, and when I turned back... I saw Hasegawa.

“Hasegawa?! Something happened?”

“I've visited a bathroom, and now returning back. And you?”

“Me too. I'm back from the toilet.”

“Oh, I see... You have disappeared suddenly, and I didn't know where you go. So you just left for a toilet...”

Yes, Hasegawa said exactly what I heard. I never could expect her to say it. Now I think it's great I didn't leave.

“Kashiwada-kun, thank you for inviting me today.”

“Eh?” – I was surprised Hasegawa thanked me. Could it be that she has fun today? Speaking with that guys?.. Oh, wait, what is with this depressing urge?

“I didn't notice it when I received your email, but... Did you invite me here out of concern, because I said that?”

“Eh? What “that”?”

“When we were at Odaiba, I said I will try to make friends with the classmates.”

“Eh...”

This is true, but... If I ask her, how it is going, she probably would consider me

as a nice guy who's worried about Hasegawa. But that's not what I'm actually feeling. Well, it's true I wanted to help her to make friends, but I invited her because I myself wanted to befriend with her in the first place.

"No..." – I noticed I denied that.

"Eh?"

"It's true as well, but it's not the main reason I have invited you."

"...?"

"I myself wanted to make friends with you."

I said it...

I've it just now!

"Eh?"

Hasegawa stares on my face. Hey, isn't it something like a confession? Why would I say such thing out of blue? I have not enough of attraction point, so she might be confused by this. Moreover, what if she would reject me now?

"Oh, it's not like... Well, it is, but... Friend! I want to have a friend like you, Hasegawa!"

I quickly added that I meant not love, but friendship. However, she might have understood my feelings already. I looked on Hasegawa again. She looks more surprised than earlier.

"Friends?.."

"Eh? Um." – I answered to surprised Hasegawa.

"This is the first time in my life when somebody tells me he wants to make friends with me."

"Eh?"

Hasegawa blinked slowly and keeps looking at my eyes. Hey, I'll feel embarrassed if you watch me like this.

"I'm very happy for some reason." – Hasegawa's face shined with a calm smile. I've been watching her all the time, but I felt this is the first time she

smiled since she came here.

“Thank you. I want to make friends with you, too.” – declared Hasegawa. She wants to make friends with me.

Usually, I would be shocked if a girl of my unrequited love said me that she wants to make friends with me, but now I’m very happy. She had not recognized me as a friend until recently, and yet she told me that she wants us to be friends. There is nothing more joyous for me.

“Maybe, we have to return already.” – said Hasegawa making her way to the sheeting with everybody.

“Ah, okay.”

Yes, they may find it strange if we won’t return for a long time. (They most likely already forgot about me, they should worry about Hasegawa) But I don’t want to return to that place, I want to be alone with Hasegawa for a little more...

“Let’s stay here for a while.” – I uttered a very proactive offer, as for me.

“Eh?”

“Well, there is noisy and difficult to speak,

“You’re right.” – the unexpected answer gave Hasegawa.

“Me too... I’m sorry for them, but I’m feeling quieter here.”

“Eh...”

What did Hasegawa mean by that? Can I get understand it she feels quieter speaking with me?

At that moment, a big firework illuminated all the night sky.

“Wow, that’ beautiful.”

“Yes, I glad I was it.”

We were impressed. Yes, I really glad I saw it.

I saw such a beautiful firework, standing beside Hasegawa. I’m very happy now.

I can't believe I was so depressed I wanted to go home just a minute ago.

I'm grateful to Koigasaki who stopped me. I'm happy I didn't go home.

We watched fireworks for a while, saying no words. We had nothing to talk, yet I was happy.

Unfortunately, after a while we should have to return because everybody would suspect something. I foresaw that Hasegawa would be taken by another guy again, and I will have to spend time immersed in depression alone.

Upon returning, Koigasaki noticed me and looking with surprise. She did look like she wants to speak to me.

"Ah, Kashiwada and Hasegawa-san! Where have you been?" – Sasagawa spoke to me earlier. It was unexpected.

"A toilet."

"Really? I bet you did it standing up anyway."

I noticed Sasagawa acts strangely. She's too joyful. Why would she talk to me, if we never properly spoke before?

Oh, she is drunk. And she's not alone, most of our classmates got drunk while we were absent. Of course, those from sports clubs look serious, probably they didn't drink, but the bigger half is surely drunk.

"A-ah, Miki, you're drunk! Yet it was you who warned us to not drink too much..." – Koigasaki got angry with Sasagawa.

"Momo... Don't play a good girl and take a sip too." – Sasagawa put her arm on Koigasaki's neck.

"High school students should not drink at all!" – Koigasaki completely rejected Sasagawa's words. As I thought, she is a gyaru only at her façade, and a serious girl inside.

"Oh, by the way! Mizuki! Mizuki-chan! Come here!" – suddenly, Sasagawa called for Amemiya.

"Eh? I can't move now~" – Amemiya lied on the Takagi's lap.

"I said come! Who is more important for you, men or friends?" – Sasagawa

insisted.

“Men, of course.” – replied Amemiya, yet she got up from the sleeping Takagi, and slowly came to Sasagawa.

“You should have told something to Kashiwada, right?” – I was shocked hearing own name in this circumstances.

“What?..”

“Apologize! Don’t you remember you said too much?” – Amemiya wasn’t happy about that by any means, she even complained she must do it now. While I have been trying to get what’s happening...

“Ah... Kashiwada, I said you bothering Momo, but that was a lie. I’m sorry.” – she apologized to me! She was bothered by it, she obviously resented, and she wasn’t sincere, yet she apologized after all this time. It was the first semester, when she met me at a corridor and said not to get closer to Koigasaki because I’m bothering her. I was surprised. Well, I did know that I’m not a bother from long ago.

“Oh, not at all...” – I was surprised, but I decided to reply anyway.

“Okay. Reconciliation complete~.” – said happily Sasagawa. We weren’t friends before that, you know?

“Okay, I’m returning to Daisuke.” – said Amemiya and returned to where she has been. Apparently, Daisuke is a Takagi’s name. I’m surprised, but I’m happy she apologized.

“Wah... Momo-chi, let me use your lap, like Mizuki and Takagi.”

“H-hey, Miki? Are you an old man?” – Sasagawa seems to be truly drunk, so she has lied her head on Koigasaki’s lap before Koigasaki agreed.

“Ah, what a pleasure! Your legs are so soft~.”

“Stupid! That’s creepy!” – Koigasaki looks like she dislikes that, but she don’t push Sasagawa off

“He-he. ” – I heard a low laughter. Turning back, I was surprised to see smiling Hasegawa.

“Hasegawa?”

“Sasagawa is a fun girl. Drinking beer in such age is not good, though.”

I was surprised Hasegawa would laugh at this, but I was happy.

“Hasegawa-chan, don’t be obstinate, let’s drink together~!”

“I guess I’m out...”

“Miki, don’t push on Hasegawa-san, you’re bothering her! Ah...” – Koigasaki said and took a sip from a paper cup beside her.

“Gu... Uwah, what’s this? Nasty...”

“Ah, that’s a Denki Bran, the loser of our game must drink it in one gulp.” – said a boy from nearby with an awkward face.

“Denki Bran?” – I asked.

“It’s a cocktail with about forty degrees of alcohol, but it’s like a usual brandy. A very strong drink. Did she... drank it?” – he quickly explained.

“Forty degrees? Koigasaki, are you okay?”

“A-a! My throat was very dry, I needed some oolong tea, and took this by mistake... My tongue stings!”

I think you could feel that it’s an alcohol after the very first sip, so why did you drank that, Koigasaki?

“Momo-chan, here, drink it and relax.” – Sasagawa gave her another paper cup.

“Thank you, Miki... What a strange flavor!”

“No way! I believe I’ve been drinking a cola until now, let me... Ah, yes, it’s a sour.” – Sasagawa gets to know that’s an alcohol drink.

“Wa~! Why did you lo that?” – Koigasaki is tongue-tied already. Hey, will you be all right?..

“Ah, my pizza!” – I noticed a delivery man with pizza coming here.

“Pizza at the Fireworks Festival?!”

“Yeah, I’ve ordered by iPhone. They delivered it already!” – said Sasagawa. I

couldn't hide my surprise.

"You can order a pizza even here with an iPhone?"

"Yes, I attached my GPS coordinates. That's so useful function!"

Oh, the science progressed. When I was about to be impressed...

"...?!" – I froze seeing the pizza box. It has an illustration from an anime that ended recently.

"Eh? An anime?" – Koigasaki reacted, but she didn't know this anime. And she couldn't possibly know, it's not an all-ages anime, but a late night anime for otaku.

The plot twists around a Martian cutie Marzu-chan, who came to conquer the Earth, and the surrounding fuss. This is a minor anime, so I'm pretty sure that nobody besides otaku may know about it.

"Oh, here is a picture from an anime!" – another classmate noticed it.

By the way, I heard that if you order a pizza from some company, they'd deliver it to you in a box with various anime on it. I never thought it was true... Pizza terrorists.

"Marzu-chan?" – I barely heard that, but I'm sore I'm not overheard. I was surprised here is somebody who knows this anime too, so I turned that voice...

"Eh?"

Hasegawa was staring on the pizza box.

"I don't order such box... Well, doesn't matter. Let's dig in!" – Sasagawa rose from Koigasaki's thighs, opened the pizza and started to divide it among those who wants it. Hasegawa didn't stare on the box anymore.

Why would Hasegawa know the name of the character from the minor anime for otaku? I looked at her, – she was watching the fireworks again, as nothing happened.

When we were at Odaiba, she said she had been at the Big Sight, and I have some doubts then, but now... there is nothing to doubts about. Maybe, Hasegawa is an otaku?

“Kashiwada-a! Why are you such arrogant, hey?”

I was shocked, but familiar voice surprised me even more. Koigasaki’s face is red. Her voice put me out of rut.

“Why are you so drunk if you’ve made a single sip by mistake?”

She is way too weak against alcohol.

“Also, when exactly I was arrogant?”

I’m appalled, but I asked her for the sake.

“I don’t get why is this lame boy... What is a good in you?!”

“Huh?”

I have no idea of what Koigasaki is speaking about. Is she already broken drinking a little of alcohol?

“Your ugly face is the best of you...”

“Huh! Are you picking a fight? What are you talking about?” – I could silently listen how she hurl abuses at me.

“Oh! Why Azuki-chan... why did she tell me she likes you? I don’t get it! You’re so impassive I can’t stand it.”

“Ha?..”

My mind fell to pieces. Sakurai-san... likes me?..

“She said that?”

“I don’t know! Ask her by yourself!”

I’d be happy if it’s a true, but it’s hard to believe. However, her actions and words pointed at this...

But Koigasaki in another thing. She had been trying to convince me it’s only my imagination, and why would she do the contrary now? Which of those is true? Why she got angry with me? Also, is Hasegawa an otaku? I want to get drunk too, but I endure.

“Ho-oi, Kashiwada, the fireworks are over!” –

“Eh?”

How long was I immersed in own thoughts? The fireworks are over, and everybody is preparing to leave. After hearing Sasagawa's voice, I promptly stood up and took my boots from the sheeting.

"Hey, Kashiwada-a! Take the corner of the sheeting!"

"Are you still drunk?.."

I was disappointed she is still angry, but gripped the corner and helped to fold the sheeting.

I'm confused and everything makes no sense to me now, but there is one thing I noticed. Despite everything, they let me inside the group, and I enjoyed today. I never thought I'd be so happy when I decided to go home earlier.

I have spoken with Hasegawa, and I was happy to hear she wants to befriend with me. Does it mean I've grown since the karaoke party? Or, maybe, it was nothing but luck? Too many things shocked me, so I can't just enjoy everything.

After we disposed of the trash and prepared for leaving, the classmates made to the station. Our big company was dissolved in the crowd, and we left by small groups.

"Koigasaki, why are you so drunk?"

Koigasaki still staggered, so I even started to worry about her. Even Sasagawa, who had drunk much more than Koigasaki, walks as usual.

"Obwh!" – Koigasaki suddenly stopped, and I bumped into her.

"Why did you stop suddenly?"

"Eh?"

Koigasaki had stopped dead round-eyed in astonishment.

"Suzuki...kun..."

"Eh?"

I looked the same way. There was Suzuki walking in the crowd. It's a great coincidence, but nothing to be shocked. A girl in yukata walked beside Suzuki. She is holding his arm, and they seem to be enjoying being together.

"Suzuki-kun... has a girlfriend?" – said Koigasaki with collapsing voice.

Suzuki has a girlfriend?! Impossible! Why would a girl-hater like Suzuki have a girlfriend?

“Hey, you two, why are you staying?” – said Sasagawa. It feels her voice is somewhere far away, and is not related to us.

There is a mess in my mind apart from this, don’t clutter it anymore!..

## Afterword

Hello, my readers! Here is Murakami Rin with you.

Thank you for reading the third volume of “Omae o Otaku ni Shiteyaru kara, Ore o Riajuu ni Shitekure!”, shortened as “Otaria”. At the moment of publishing this volume, many of my coworkers know that I’m a ranobe writer, also my pen name and even the title name are revealed! ( I have revealed). (Smile) In the third volume, Kashiwada goes to a date with his first love, Momo goes to her first Summer Comiket. I used my experience for one of that. (smile) It wasn’t a date, but we gathered by a group of four people, had eaten too much at Odaiba, felt bad after a ride in Joypolis, and had occupied a toilet cabin – I did those all. Of course, I had no improvement, unfortunately. Kashiwada’s misses are mine, actually.

Mr. Manager, thank you for the advice and consolation. I’m sorry for insubordination.(smile)

Mr. Anapon! I can’t see your pictures except for the cover and the frontispiece because you haven’t finished them yet, but Momo wearing casuals is cuter than I expected! (smile) Also, my joy has no bounds seeing a new character design! Thank you very much!

Dear readers who sent me the letters. I’m unable to answer all your questions, due to severe lack of time... I’m sorry. I’ll properly thank you for completing a good work! thank you for responses, opinions, and support! Also, I’m grateful for useful information!

The last, I have some news. You probably noticed when you took this book in

your hands, but from the Monthly Comic Alive June issue on April 27, this work will be converted to the manga! I can't wait for it! I hope you too.

Okay, the second semester starts in the next volume, and I'll be happy to see you then!

Murakami Rin